

Luc Tuymans on Baroque  
01.06–16.09.2018

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# Sanguine/ Bloedrood



M HKA

**Luc Tuymans on Baroque**

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# Sanguine/ Bloedrood

During the cultural city festival *Antwerp Baroque 2018. Rubens inspires*, curator Luc Tuymans juxtaposes the spirit of the baroque masters with the vision of contemporary top artists. The exhibition *Sanguine/Bloedrood* aims to overwhelm the visitor by placing key works from the Baroque in dialogue with the work of classical contemporary masters, and new works by contemporary stars. *Sanguine/Bloedrood* is a visually opulent and challenging exhibition that brings old masters into the experimental spaces of contemporary art.

The term 'baroque' continues to evoke some of its original negative connotations - exaggeration and indulgence - but simultaneously suggests something exciting, something elusive. Tuymans brushes the dust from the threadbare term, and revisits the intensity of the image. Tuymans chose the evocative, poetic *Sanguine/Bloedrood* – as an energy flow of life and death – as the title for the exhibition.

Tuymans chooses not to set up *Sanguine/Bloedrood* as an art-historical, canonical overview, but according to his own personal interpretation that deliberately leaves many gaps. It is the gaze of a creator onto other creators.

*Sanguine/Bloedrood* presents works of, John Armleder, Carla Arocha & Stéphane Schraenen, Fred Bervoets, Michaël Borremans, Mike Bouchet, Adriaen Brouwer, Caravaggio, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Thierry De Cordier, Cornelis De Vos,

Francisco de Zurbarán, Lili Dujourie, Marlene Dumas, Zhang Enli, Jan Fabre, Lucio Fontana, Marcel Gautherot, Isa Genzken, Joris Ghekiere, Franciscus Gijsbrechts, Pierre Huyghe, Jonathan Johnson, Jacob Jordaens, On Kawara, Edward Kienholz, Jukka Korkeila, Dominik Lejman, Takashi Murakami, Nadia Naveau, Bruce Nauman, Johann Georg Pinsel, Sigmar Polke, Tobias Rehberger, Peter Paul Rubens, Yutaka Sone, Henri Storck, Piotr Tolmachov, Pascale Marthine Tayou, Javier Téllez, David Gheron Tretiakoff, Dennis Tyfus, Anthony van Dyck, Jan Van Imschoot, Jan Vercruyse and Jack Whitten.

The exhibition is a joint organisation of the M HKA, Studio Luc Tuymans, the KMSKA and Fondazione Prada. Following the Antwerp edition, a second and new version of the exhibition will be shown at Fondazione Prada's Milan venue from October 2018 to February 2019.

Curator: Luc Tuymans

The cultural city festival *Antwerp Baroque 2018. Rubens inspires* pays homage to Peter Paul Rubens and his Baroque, cultural heritage. During the festival, the spotlight will be on Peter Paul Rubens, one of the most influential artists ever and the most famous inhabitant of Antwerp. He personifies the Baroque period and is an important source of inspiration for contemporary artists and the atypical lifestyle of the city and its inhabitants. *Antwerp Baroque 2018. Rubens inspires* tells

## Introduction

a story about the Baroque, in the past and the present, and creates a dialogue between historic Baroque and the work of contemporary artists. With the city of Antwerp and the world as its décor. *Antwerp Baroque 2018. Rubens inspires* is a key event in VisitFlanders' Flemish Masters programme. It promises to be explicitly extroverted and to combine artistic originality with authentic hospitality. From June 2018 to January 2019 in Antwerp.

More information on  
[www.antwerpbaroque2018.be](http://www.antwerpbaroque2018.be)

# January 2018

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A conversation between Luc Tuymans, Bart De Baere and  
Manfred Sellink on the occasion of *Sanguine/Bloedrood*.  
*Luc Tuymans on Baroque*



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**Luc Tuymans:** “The installation of Edward Kienholz kick-starts the exhibition. The iconic work had gone ‘missing’ for 40 years, it had been hidden in a Japanese collection all that time. It resurfaced in 2011 and was immediately shown to the public again. First in the basement of the LACMA, then in the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Copenhagen, and then in the Prada Foundation, which bought the work and linked it to a larger retrospective around Kienholz’s *oeuvre*. Although 45 years old, the installation is extremely contemporary. It is a very political, social and critical piece of work. It has a certain urgency about it.

We show the installation in a tent on the Waalse Kaai, located between the M HKA and the KMSKA. So outside the premises, in the intimate darkness of a dome. Exactly as *Five Car Stud* was initially shown, on the Documenta of 1972, by Harald Szeemann. Although our tent is not made of exactly the same material, it does have approximately the same dimensions.

When I first saw the work from a distance, it reminded me of **Goya’s** *El tres de mayo*. Maybe not a Baroque painting, but a work by an old master anyway. It is overwhelming and - as it shows an execution - has an obvious element of violence. That overwhelming and violent aspect is also present in Kienholz’s installation. For me, that makes *Five Car Stud* the connecting piece between Baroque paintings and contemporary art. The work is not only the starting point of the exhibition, it also owes its title – *Sanguine/Bloedrood* – to it.

The work of **Kienholz** (*Five Car Stud*), together with the work of Caravaggio, form the two benchmarks between which the contemporary field will develop. The fact that the Baroque style has been engrained in Western image thinking and has, as such, inspired various power groups, is often overlooked. This is clearly reflected in a colonial context, however. It is one of the reasons why **Pascale Tayou**, and also **Johann Georg Pinsel** from Ukraine, are in the exhibition.

The image is overwhelming within the iconic installation. There are three elements that play and that are continuously present throughout the exhibition: the index, the symbol and the icon. The theatricality of Kienholz’s work also raises the question of whether or not the image moves. It contains a cinematic element.

*The documentation on **Five Car Stud** – a work by Edward Kienholz and his wife Nancy – can be visited outside the exhibition on the first floor of the M HKA.*

The large works by **Rubens** - which we do not show in the KMSKA, but in churches - show that they are not actually made for the intimate atmosphere, but for the public domain in particular. That is why we show the film by **Henri Storck** *Rubens* in the exhibition. Outside, on the facade of the M HKA, we project images of **David and Goliath** by **Caravaggio**, which we filmed at Villa Borgehse. In this way, we reinforce the cinematic character and the narrative of the exhibition. It is not an exhibition that will be jam-packed with

works, but one that is perceptually grafted on identities and entities.

In the centre is a work by **Carla Arocha and Stéphane Schraenen** *Circa Tabac*, which has already been shown in The Wallace Collection in London. *Circa Tabac* creates a total fragmentation of the form. Everything is segmented, falls apart again, and this effect is emphasised even further because the work itself is a mirror. The cinematic aspect is present here in an extreme, repetitive form. It is also present in the physical relationship between the viewer and what is, or is not, visible when you look at the sculpture from a distance. That's why it was particularly important to show this 13-metre-long sculpture in the round space.

A clear reference to **Caravaggio**. It is an older work, which also makes use of projection. The grandfather of **Leijman's** girlfriend is projected onto a painted surface. He has installed a swimming pool in the basement of his house, without power streaming, but with a harness that physically prevents you from swimming forward. You see that older man vaguely making a fierce forward crawl movement in the water, which suggests an eminent feeling of 'presence'.

**Joris Ghekiere** has a very eclectic oeuvre. His works navigate between figurative images with a certain form of lyricism and abstracted forms. But there is always an investigation into the meaning of the surface of a painting. It works as a screen and at the same time it functions as a kind of benchmark. Of the contemporary artists, apart from a few rare exceptions, we usually display one work within the exhibition. I thought that would be better for the artist, and more clear-cut for the overall project that has become *Sanguine/Bloedrood*.

In this work by **Francisco de Zurbarán**, as in the installation of Kienholz, there is that element of mutilation. At the same time, it also refers back to the dome, which is outside and forms the stage for *Five Car Stud*.

The video of **Javier Téllez** strikes me as Baroque, in the sense that it is about something iconic: the image of the lion, the image of power. For me as well as for my wife, it is a work with a strong emotional connotation. She is from Venezuela, just like Javier Téllez. When we first saw the video, the destruction of the land was already visible. In a very iconic way, you see a stuffed lion that is carried and touched by extras, dressed as police officers, through the shanti towns. The element of decay has an almost epic quality. The entire exhibition takes place within the concept of monumentality. This is, in fact, a common thread that connects old masters with contemporary works.

**Takashi Murakami** is also in the exhibition, with a display case full of mock-ups / preliminary studies and with a photo of an existing work *The Birth of a Universe*. Unfortunately, bringing the real sculpture to Antwerp proved too expensive. Besides, it would interfere with the works of **Pinsel Mater Dolorosa en Saint John the Baptist**. With Murakami's works, we indirectly focus on the way the Baroque keeps on enjoying an upward movement. When I first made a painting of a Baroque church, I was amazed by the pure technique with which the builders combined images and in an elevated form, almost like a rocket, spatially enlarged the image plane. **Murakami** does the same, but in a different way. His background is more cynical, his work is a reflection of his *Superflat* aesthetics, and a reference to the fact that people have forgotten that two atomic bombs fell on Japan.

At the same time, however, there are overlaps with the Baroque. He works from an Asian tradition, from the arts and crafts idea, which is extremely professionalized and refined. Teamwork at Murakami means that conceptually, the work is his, but he doesn't do everything himself. That was the same with **Rubens**, who, from his studio, would come up with an image, which was then executed elsewhere. The exhibition also contains two sketches by Rubens, which make the hand of the

master very clear within that process. **Murakami's** work also contains a PR element, which relates in an inert way to what he actually means: a nihilistic view of life. In the case of the Baroque, this view is different, but there is just as much a contradiction between two worldviews and at the same time a visual uniformity.

We will introduce **On Kawara** to the exhibition with his *Date* Paintings. That is the Kawara who everyone knows. Later, he reappears with earlier, lesser-known work. The *Date* Paintings can be understood from a minimalist and conceptual point of view, but at the same time, they contain what happens on a certain day. So Kawara adds a unity of time and an element of remembrance. I found it fascinating to place him in the vicinity of Murakami, and to get both artists talking, as it were. The *Date* Paintings are an announcement of what you will see further down the road from On Kawara in the exhibition: an unexpected and more direct work *Thanatophanies*.

**David Gheron Tretiakoff** has made a very specific work *Immolation I, II, III, IV*, which consists of four sheets of rice paper. It is extremely fragile, and the sheets of rice paper are reminiscent of human skin, not least because they contain images of people setting fire to themselves in an act of protest. Those images are made with the glowing end of a burning cigarette. In combination with the very fragile structure of the paper, it acquires an almost poetic value and becomes a work that, despite its cruelty, still has a certain beauty. The images also have the quality of 'remnant', after the devastating fire. Moreover, branding with cigarettes is a method of torture. David Gheron Tretiakoff takes topicality to a new level in his images, while making them lyrical and bearable.

Lili Dujourie was an obvious choice for me. She is an iconic, female Belgian artist, and greatly undervalued. Dujourie plays with the sensuality of the image. She has a very clear, sharp look at how the formal

aspect can change to a different kind of narrative. There is also an element of reflection, of resistance in her work. This is also evident in *The Kiss*, where the undulating tenderness of soft matter contrasts with the hardness of a triangle, which spatially makes an architectural point. There is also a field of tension in it that is always present in the Baroque.

A grand piano on the floor with blue glass on top, this work by Jan Vercruysse immediately catches the eye. Through the choice of material, the surface reflects a sense of inertia, which is present in the concept of fame, of notoriety. All this in a clearly detached manner. In complete silence.

Further on in the exhibition, there is auditory work, a soundpiece by **Piotr Tolmachov MM**.

**Dennis Tyfus** is an artist who can draw effortlessly. The verticality and simplicity of the yellow, overexposed surface, combined with the present graphic elements, is reminiscent of the work of **David Gheron Tretiakoff**. There is again a multitude of things to see. As a spectator, you really have to look at it for a while to see all the different elements. It is a narrative in a narrative, in different forms and at different times at the same time. Incidentally, that is what we are showing throughout the exhibition.

The dark painting by **Marlène Dumas** - for me one of the strongest contemporary female painters - shows a woman turning around. I chose this work mainly because of its gestuality, which reflects both remarkable directness and extreme restraint. Black also plays an important role. The contrast between black and white in the image evokes another colonial memory.

This work is a huge enlargement of a hamburger. So there is the notion of eating, but as it is extrapolated by its size, it is impossible to eat it now. So the extremely elaborate and extremely vulgar seek confrontation with the work

of, for example, On Kawara, or Marlène Dumas, Nadia Naveau, Rubens or Jan Van Imschoot. But it also contrasts with Bouchet's second work *Isabel Dos Santos Jacuzzi*, a cardboard jacuzzi that has been rendered unusable. It is shown here as a ruin.

I know Jan Van Imschoot personally, and it is simply impossible for me to curate an exhibition on Baroque work without him. He is an artist who could easily paint a Tintoretto. He goes straight to the heart of the Baroque. Since Van Imschoot is also a real Rubens fan, I deliberately did not to hang him next to the two sketches of Rubens.

We could also have settled for Jeff Koons here with his *Blue Balls*, but I found Nadia Naveau even more essential in the context of this exhibition, the clash between Baroque and Contemporary Art. Unlike the work of **Jan Fabre**, for example, that of Naveau is more sculptural. It is more specific in the language of form, with a special tension between objects from the workout culture, which at the same time develop into Louis XV-like busts. All the works we have chosen play with this twilight zone. There are centuries between the different works, but I always wanted to be able to make the connection. In every exhibition I create, there is a cognitive link in the entire visual story, but in this case the big challenge was to develop that story *in extremis*.

We show Pascale Tayou's work in the inbetween spaces, close to **Jan Fabre's** drawings, which he made with his blood. I found it interesting that there is an imaginary city on the ceiling, which was made in a different place, by different hands and shipped with a container to the port of Antwerp. The texture of the city clearly shows how the different parts were made, how they were calibrated. This is about the recovery of materials that create this urban sculpture that turns back onto itself, yet formulates a strangeness.

**Jan Fabre** could not have been absent from the exhibition. Not only because he is a local, but especially because his work has a high Baroque content. In this exhibition, he has opted for a minimal intervention. The blood, which forms a kind of trace, is thus a characteristic Fabre work: in its smallness, as a writing material or as a relic, there is also a megalomaniac element to it.

The three works by the German artist **Tobias Rehberger** combine sculpture and projection. At first sight they are almost furniture-like, but behind the sculptures, a kind of haze of visual material can be seen. These are projections of films, of images that you can't actually make out. The real contemporary aspect is blocked off by the formal aspect of the sculptures, by Rehberger's own formal idiom.

**Bruce Nauman** is the total counterpart of what **Rehberger** does. This old work by Nauman is one of his first video works. He was a frontrunner in video art, and made all these kinds of works long before other artists did. He shows his works in a compressed form, very brutal and confronting in space.

There are three drawings by **Michaël Borremans** in the exhibition, from the SMAK collection. Mainly because I think Borremans is very strong, especially as a draughtsman. That's why I wanted to show three older drawings. The house and the accumulation of characters is, in a perverse way, highlighted by the reductions and enlargements.

**On Kawara's** other work is a set of 30 lithographs, originally from 1955. The portraits are all based on victims of the H bomb. The work is gruesome in its realism. It is often forgotten that Kawara's earlier work was also figurative, and these lithographs are a prime example of this. It is a totally unexpected work, monumental in its modesty. The work will be shown in a kind of square, in a certain order, and will cover one wall. Much like in a middle-class front room. In my opinion, this work

is equivalent to the work of Kienholz, albeit obviously in a completely different way.

Marcel Gautherot was a late-comer to the exhibition, and is more suited to the list of documentaries. The exhibition contains two areas for documentaries. The first, in a long corridor at the end of the exhibition, connects with the *Five Car Stud* of Kienholz, and is purely set out for documentaries: this is where the preliminary studies and the source material are shown. The purpose of this corridor is to contextualise Kienholz's work in time, outside of the tent. Spectators can choose the viewing order themselves: first *Five Car Stud* followed by the background information, or the other way round. First the immediate experience and then the reflection.

At the other documentary spot, we see the reverse of preliminary studies: Gautherot took photographs of the statues of a Baroque sculptor, Aleijadinho, from the 17th century. These images are integrated in Baroque churches, and can, of course, not be moved. That is why Gautherot, who was also Oscar Niemeyer's photographer, took photographs of these sculptures in Brazil. The colonial aspect is once again present, which demonstrates the extreme spread of the Baroque period over time.

In France, no more painting is being done, even though there are a few astonishingly good artists. **Pierre Huyghe** is one of them. With his work, he too takes a swipe at contemporary events, but at the same time draws on a certain theatricality. The theatricality here is of an animal nature. Huyghe uses a monkey, trained to serve in an eatery, and brings it back to Fukushima after the nuclear disaster. On the monkey's face, he places a no-mask, so that the being becomes a kind of hybrid creature - between man and monkey - that tries to find its way among the rubble. Like in a labyrinth. Since we have to show the film horizontally and in a large format, the image is positively impressive.

*De gezegende nederlaag* of Fred Bervoets is a work that is very often misunderstood. I consciously chose one of those spaghetti paintings from the 1970s. These were very contemporary at the time. They contain an extreme sense of violence, A Clockwork Orange-like quality, a kind of vibrating aesthetics. The paintings work well within a Baroque exhibition, both here and in the Prada Foundation.

We show the work on a black wall, extrapolating the use of colour and the tangle. This formal idiom was very much demarcated for Bervoets. It is also more mechanical than lyrical, although Bervoets is better known for the latter. So it is a *pittura metaphisica* of Bervoets.

**Yutaka Sone** is the Japanese artist with the ice crystals. The work in the exhibition is a very small work, but again a small work that grows bigger because of its specificity. I've always found this a fascinating work, because it's such a crystallized concept. So simple, but oh so perfectly made.

The work of **Piotr Tolmachov**, a Belarusian, is a soundpiece. It uses the sound available in the room and sucks it back through suction cups connected to the speakers, which rhythmically move through the room. This soundpiece also provides an exciting interaction with the work next to it, by Sone, giving the latter an extra dimension.

The choice of **Sigmar Polke** and his *Lanterna Mágica* seems to me to be self-evident. He is an artist who has always made a connection between image and alchemy. He draws on the old Western way of thinking, but does so with a choice of materials on which paint will change over time. Transparent screens create double images that rotate.

With **Bucket 1 and Bucket 2**, the Chinese artist **Zhang Enli** shows two empty buckets. Two hollow objects, the traditional connotation of something that takes place inside, the less visible inside vs. the visible outside. They are juxtaposed



with a more recent work **Inane**, which shows an elastic shape that grows larger and smaller within a space.

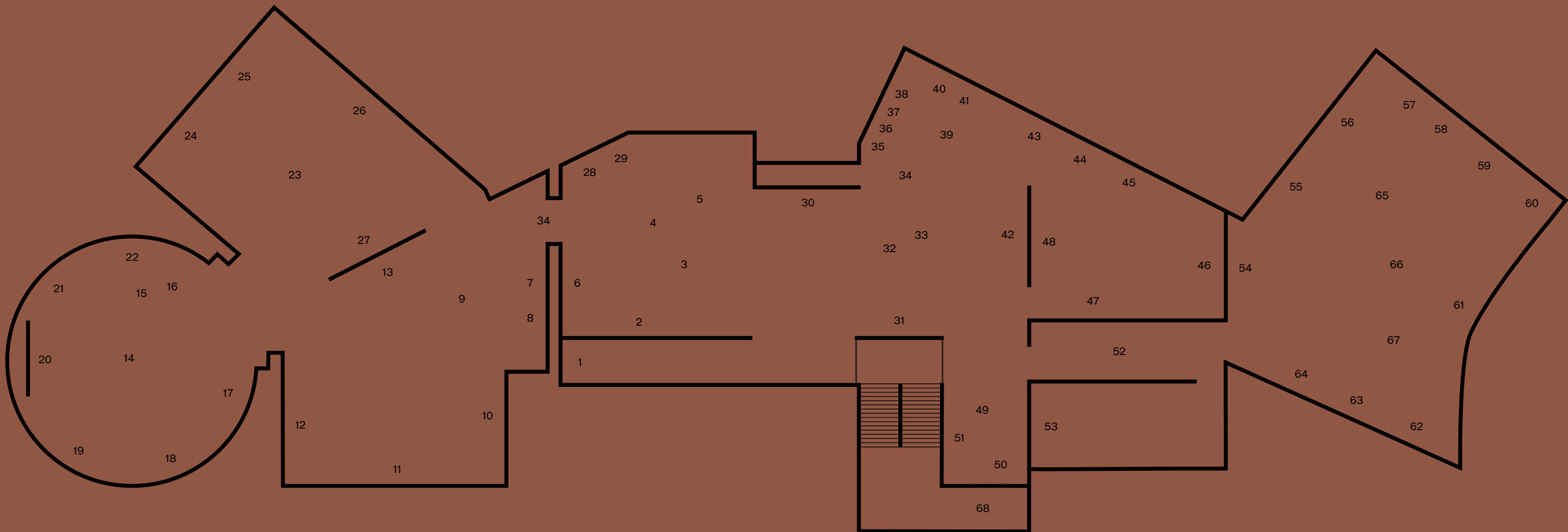
**Sleeper** of **Borremans** is, in my opinion, an epic work. It is accessible, reasonably white and bright. I thought it appropriate to place it next to a Van Dyck and one of Adriaen Brouwer's successors.

I've never initiated an exhibition myself, it has always been at someone else's request. Of course, when you do it, it has to be meaningful.

Like the **Jordaens**, which, as an iconic piece, relates to the *Five Car Stud*. The same person, Abraham Grapheus, can be depicted in Jordaens' work and another work from the KMSKA, a substantial work by Cornelis De Vos that was recently restored. In the case of Jordaens, it is a study and I found it fascinating that this character, the same head, is included in a fully-fledged painting. This Abraham Grapheus was painted at the time by the three eminent painters, namely Van Dyck, Jordaens and Rubens. It's fascinating that it receives this feedback on a human level, and I'm pleased that we have been able to achieve that.

Van Dyck will be given a role in the exhibition because, as a painter, he is a completely different from Rubens. There is a psychological dimension to his work. In the portraits he made in England, he was the first to perceive traces of the middle classes. This work shows a man from the neck, a different approach and a fascinating alternation after the works of Borremans and Jordaens, which were more studies than anything else. Van Dyck's work is a counterpoint, in which the character is shown in a proper painting."





1	Javier Téllez <i>El León de Caracas (The Lion of Caracas)</i> , 2002 Courtesy Studio Luc Tuymans	9	Jan Vercruysse <i>M (M)</i> , 1992 Collection M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art / Flemish Community	18	Jacob Jordaens <i>Studies of the Head of Abraham Grapheus</i> , 1620 Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Gent	26	On Kawara <i>Tbanatophanies</i> , 1955–1995 Courtesy Studio Luc Tuymans	34	Pascale Marthine Tayou <i>City to City</i> , 2018 Courtesy of GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana	42	Mike Bouchet <i>Brim</i> , 2015 Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Pariso Kind, Frankfurt/Main	50	Takashi Murakami <i>The Birth of a Universe</i> , 2013 Courtesy of the artist, Kaiiki Kiki Gallery
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Mike Bouchet, *Brim*, 2015 Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Parisa Kind, Frankfurt/Main, photo © M HKA

Isa Genzken, *Untitled*, 2006 Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Cologne/Berlin/New York, photo © M HKA, © SABAM Belgium 2018





**Manfred Sellink:** “I find it very fascinating to see how Luc looks at the past. He is clearly well versed in art history, but at the same time creates accents and connections that are less obvious to art historians. Contemporary artists give you a fresh look. They make you look at material in a way that is different from the strictly art-historical approach, which is valuable.

Luc and I went to a number of print rooms for the exhibition *The State of Things* in Beijing, to select graphic drawings from the 16th and 17th centuries for an exhibition that would be a confrontation between Chinese artists and graphic works by artists from the Low Countries. I always asked for the iconic works to be laid out ahead of our visit, and Luc invariably picked out the odd one out. Works that we looked at with less interest, that did not strike us as iconic. He looks with different eyes, which is hugely enriching.

This is also the case in *Sanguine/Bloedrood*. The discourse Luc quotes is on the one hand a very established art-historical discourse. The Baroque, a very complex concept, can be interpreted in many ways. But there are also very clear elements in it, such as the Poussinists versus the Rubenists, for example. This was, incidentally, an important theoretical discussion in the 17th century. It all sounds terribly learned, but it is basically about line *versus* colour, a discussion that was already held in the 16th century between the Venetians and the Florentines. Rubens represents colour, while Poussin represents the clear line. And when Luc makes such a counterpoint between de La Tour on the one hand - which ultimately did not make it to the exhibition - and Rubens on the other hand, it is, in fact, a contemporary continuation of that centuries-old discourse between line and colour. De La Tour is not really a Poussinist, but he does have that clear line that he borrows from Caravaggio. This is juxtaposed by the whirlwind of movement, in which Rubens mixes the Venetian palette with Caravaggio's chiaroscuro. I look at that contradiction from an academic point of view, Luc from an artistic point of view. The two approaches are complementary and actually meet in the same place.

What makes it even richer, even more interesting, is that it gives a different perspective on the Baroque. No ahistorical view, but a look at what the impact of the Baroque, of colour, line, claire-obscure and violence meant in the Baroque tradition up to the 18th, 19th, 20th century. And what they still mean today. Luc makes those connections, Luc draws those lines. That's what I find so valuable about an exhibition like this.”

**Bart De Baere:** “What I like is that the artistic ability is being used again in the interest of art. What Luc does is very articulated. The artist's visual thinking has a different speed than academic thinking. It breaks with the system of how we normally verbalise things, visual thinking creates very sharp combinations. The entire exhibition can be seen as a long series of moves and choices. As a kind of meaning that comes from Luc. He uses the artist's artistic capacity to give art a shot in the arm.”

**MS:** “The beauty of this kind of exhibition is that it offers a platform. Not only for the horrible, but important, word ‘contextualising’, but also to show that art - whether it be Baroque, 15th or 16th century - was in the past much more international and fluid. There is no such thing as Flemish Baroque. Antwerp had a number of important Baroque painters who have a number of things in common, but there are also overlaps with painters from the South or the North. For example, it is very interesting to compare Rubens' portraits with those of Rembrandt. The division into national



schools is something that dates back to the 1830s or 1840s, when all the major national museums were established. The Europe of nations as we know it was born. It is understandable that at a certain point we started to look at these visual languages and traditions for guidance, at the expense of certain ways of looking at things. Ways of looking at a lot of connections that are extremely interesting.

This kind of exhibition does make those kinds of connections, geographically as well as in time. We are living in a period where we are faced with more images than ever before. If you look at the speed at which those images attack us, I cannot imagine people saying that Poussin is too complicated. It is precisely this era, with all its images, that I find suitable to explain the complex and interesting images from the past.”

**Luc Tuymans:** “It is also impossible to go beyond globalisation. We live in a time when no more questions are asked about globalisation. With the rise of populism and the comeback of nationalism, the story of the Baroque as a turning point is both interesting and topical. That’s why Kienholz is so captivating, because he tells the story of segregation. We live in a time of the internet, of Wikipedia, but they have had the opposite result to what you’d expect. You would expect them to make information accessible to everyone, but the Internet is, of course, run by a small number of people. Hopefully, art will always escape this cataloguing. An exhibition about the Baroque lends itself to this, because breaking through the cataloguing is perhaps what the Baroque initially did, before art was classified as being Baroque. It is rather unclear where the Baroque originated. It is not the Renaissance that has been reformulated from ancient times. And it is a completely different viewpoint from everything that came afterwards. It was a rupture, a turning point.”

**BDB:** “The Baroque era is in many ways the beginning of our time, not only in terms of globalisation. It is a time when images start having an edge: an edge of commercialisation, cynicism, conceivability,... I’ve always seen that as a kind of orgasm of transgression, of total excess, while it is actually about accepting a form of complexity, a kind of insolubility in the image. While the brightness that is present in worldviews, presented in art, is partly connected with a borderline experience. That is the borderline experience that we now experience together.”

**MS:** “We have to be careful not to reduce the Baroque to just the grand, overwhelming gesture. That is, of course, present, but if you study the 17th century, you notice not only the epic and the great but also the intimate and the small. The caricature of the Baroque as we know it is only a fraction of a much more complex and interesting reality. If you look at Van Dyck’s small study head, the beautiful intimate painted portrait of two young girls by Woutiers, or Brouwer’s genre scene, you will immediately notice a large variety. So there is a very strong filmic element in the Baroque from our perspective, but that can be both the real epic - think of Rubens, or a Spielberg-like spectacle - and the stilled shot.”

**BDB:** “At the time, violence was much more direct than it had been for a long time, but the remarkable thing is that it has now regained its interest value. It’s making a come-back, there is a kind of cruelty in the public image today, in the way things are discussed and in their inevitability. Violence and

cruelty are not as close to us as they were then, fortunately. When you read detailed reports of the 80-year war, you’d think it was common practice.”

**LT:** “At the time, people lived and breathed violence.”

**BDB:** “Yes, but we are now again forced to live with it, and you are looking for ways to deal with it. You continually make that point in contemporary art, in the choices you make. There is now, I think, a greater relevance than 30 years ago when we were in a kind of cocoon and imagined that violence had disappeared from our existence.”

**LT:** “The fascinating thing about Rubens, of course, is that violence is a luxury problem. It is luxuriously exhibited in his paintings, and there is a certain cynicism in it. Rubens marketed the violence through his appearance. You get a form of pornography, but different from Caravaggio, where it really becomes physical.”

**BDBe:** “I find it strange that you call it pornographic, because with pornography, you cross a line for me that is relevant. Artists then made a mockery of things: ‘this is a reality, and I’m going to include it in my work’. So I would not call that pornographic, but rather a way of looking the often harsh reality in the eye. Pornography is not about looking things in the eye, it is about total objectification.”

**MS:** “You also have to look at the context of certain works. Large altarpieces, whether by Caravaggio or Rubens, play a totally different role than cabinets designed for the intimacy of houses. They require a different way of looking at things. The large altarpieces used a visual language at the service of these institutions. We are also used to seeing paintings in a fairly neutral and well-lit spaces, but you have to imagine that many of those paintings at the time could only be admired in the dark with some candles. If you could see them at all, because triptychs were usually closed. It also stank in the church. These are all completely different circumstances. A Caravaggio must have made a crushing impression in twilight. That violence in the counter-reformation was also deliberate, people had to empathize with the pain of the torture of the saints and with the suffering of Christ. So you had to include that theatrical aspect in those large altars.

This is completely different with pieces designed for the intimacy of a house, where violence would, instead, nauseate. There is a very good example of a painter who is not a Baroque artist: Pieter Bruegel. He made a painting that depicted the murder of innocent children. It was in royal possession in the 17th century, presumably in Sweden, and all those children were painted away. They were replaced with merchandise. Children who were slaughtered, that was a no-no in the 17th century, and certainly not in a royal setting. Too horrifying, it was then found. The painting - which is now part of the royal collection in England - now looks very strange: Spanish soldiers burning fire treasures in a Flemish village, while planting their swords in merchandise and wicker baskets. But based on copies, we know what’s actually underneath, namely children. What was possible in churches was much more difficult to accept in domestic circles. There they did not want to live with the horror, and they preferred not to be looking at a painting that depicted the slaughter of two hundred children.”

**LT:** “That’s also the fascinating thing: we can never recreate the actual setting in which a work appeared for the first time.”

**MS:** “Now we look at images so differently, it can come across as very old-fashioned to try to reconstruct the original context.”

**BDB:** “In the case of Pontormo, you don’t even come close to seeing the image that the painter intended. His biographer, Vasari, describes how he changes a light opening somewhere at a certain moment.”

**MS:** “Yes, but it’s also up to us as spectators and admirers of art. Since the 19th century, we have started to look at religious art in a completely different way. And whether we like it or not, by taking art out of the churches and by looking at it differently now, we can reconstruct how someone looked at a Pontormo in 1550. We can apply a few simple tricks, for example by hanging some works higher when the point of view is important. In the new set-up of the KMSKA, we are going to hang the singing angels, which are three panels by Hans Memling, a lot higher than before. But still not seven meters high, as it probably once hung in the church. Nobody finds it acceptable these days to have to look at one of the absolute masterpieces of the KMSKA with a pair of binoculars. But Memling’s work was originally the top section of a large polyptych, and unfortunately nothing remains of what was underneath. So it would be very strange and artificial to hang it at that height anyway, while you don’t know or can’t see what’s beneath it. What you can do, however, is to hang the work a bit higher and thus indicate that the perspective is now different. I am very wary of moving towards such constructions. But we digress, this is about *Sanguine/Bloedrood* and the Baroque.”

**LT:** “Well, this will keep us going for a while.”

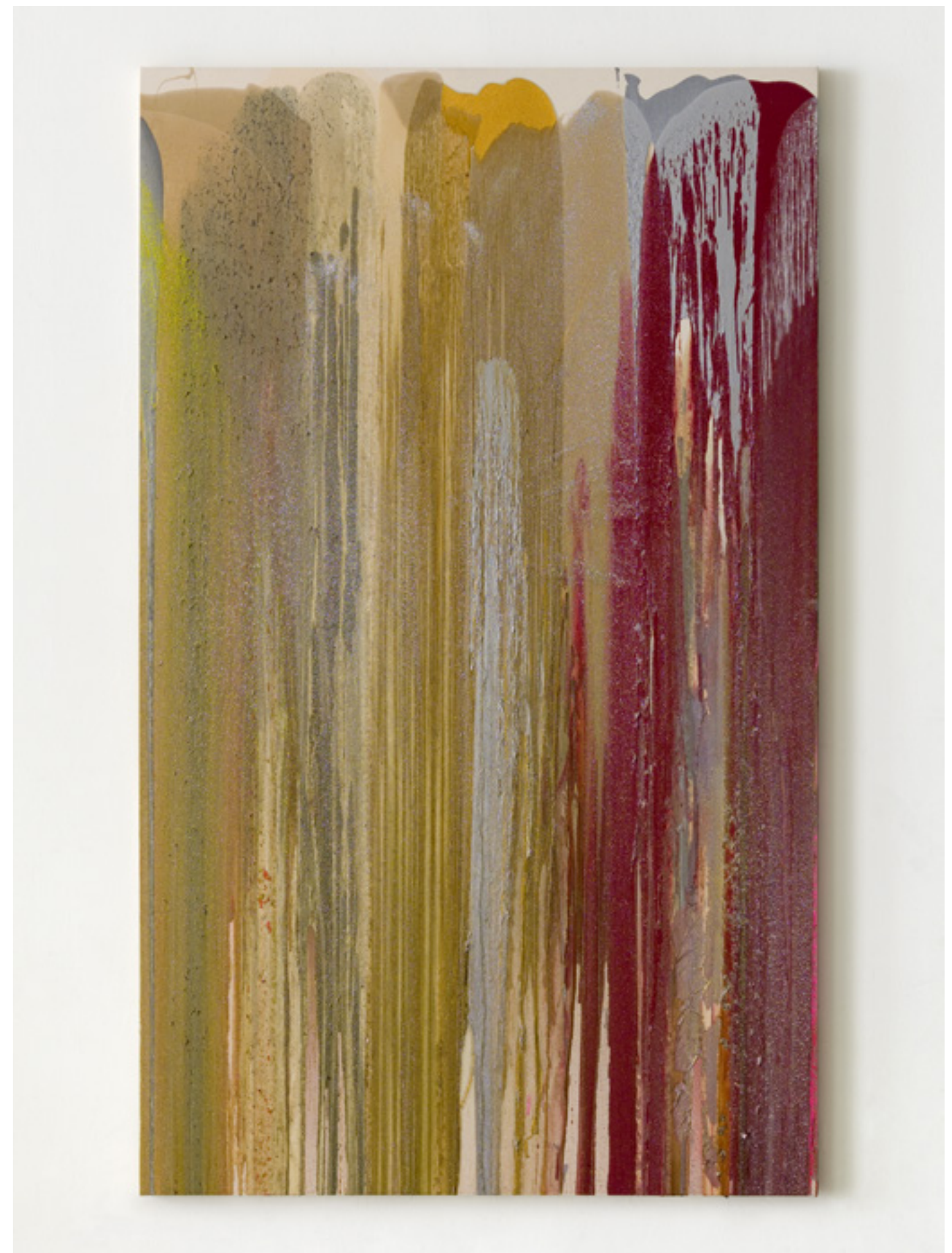
# Artists

*Sanguine/Bloedrood* exhibits work of John Armleder, Carla Arocha & Stéphane Schraenen, Fred Bervoets, Michaël Borremans, Mike Bouchet, Adriaen Brouwer, Caravaggio, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Thierry De Cordier, Cornelis De Vos, Francisco de Zurbarán, Lili Dujourie, Marlene Dumas, Zhang Enli, Jan Fabre, Lucio Fontana, Marcel Gautherot, Isa Genzken, Joris Ghekiere, Franciscus Gijsbrechts, Pierre Huyghe, Jonathan Johnson, Jacob Jordaens, On Kawara, Edward Kienholz, Jukka Korkeila, Dominik Lejman, Takashi Murakami, Nadia Naveau, Bruce Nauman, Johann Georg Pinsel, Sigmar Polke, Tobias Rehberger, Peter Paul Rubens, Yutaka Sone, Henri Storck, Piotr Tolmachov, Pascale Marthine Tayou, Javier Téllez, David Gheron Tretiakoff, Dennis Tyfus, Anthony van Dyck, Jan Van Imschoot, Jan Vercruysse en Jack Whitten.

## John Armleder

John Armleder (b. 1948) is a Swiss painter, sculptor and performance artist who has since the 1960s been working on a particularly extensive and varied oeuvre that can not be categorized in any particular style or movement. He covers the broad field of conceptual art, with varying attention to Fluxus, Constructivism, design and New Geometry (Neo-Geo). At the end of the sixties he is co-founder of the Ecart Gallery in Geneva, where, among others, Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol exhibit. Armleder has always been careful not to adhere to a specific style, and considers the person of the artist as subordinate to the oeuvre that he produces. As a conceptual artist, he focuses on formal capacity: he brings together canvases, sculptures and interior objects in a space that creates specific patterns and associations that can be completely different elsewhere or at different times. Through the inclusion of decorative art and objects from daily life, he aims to point out the lack of categorical difference between them and other artistic forms. In 2005 the bulky *catalogue raisonné* of his oeuvre is published with the telling title *About nothing*, a book with more than

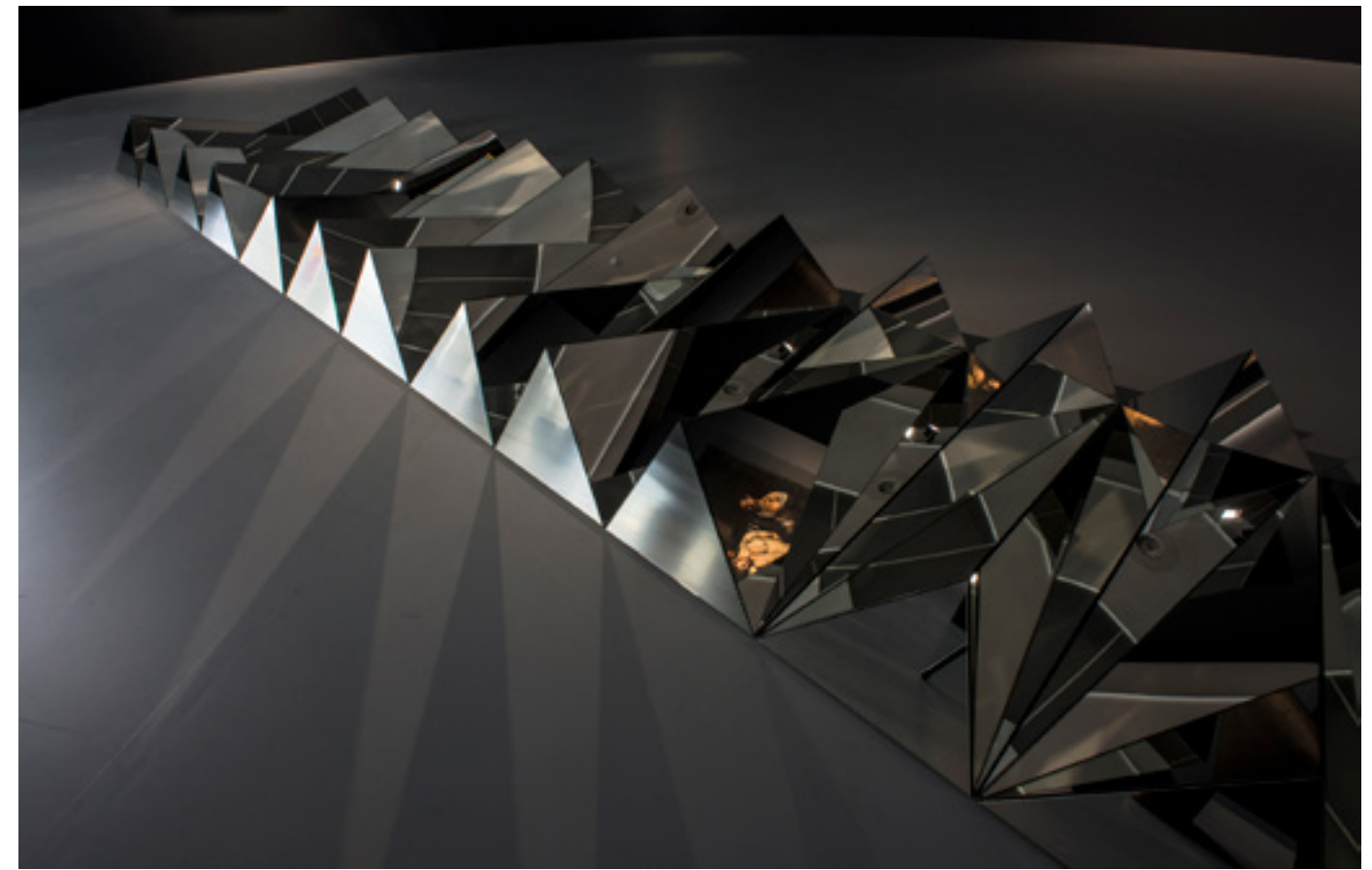
600 depicted works without a subject or specific meaning. It typifies the seriousness as well as the humour of this artist. In the exhibition *Sanguine/Bloedrood*, his oeuvre is represented by the canvas *La Locanda* from 2007. It belongs to the large series of non-figurative, vertical paintings that the artist creates in different colours but with similar line drawings. (HW)





Carla Arocha (b. 1961) is from Caracas, Venezuela, but has been living and working in Antwerp for years. Since 2005 she forms an artistic duo with the Antwerp artist Stéphane Schraenen (b. 1971). Their abstract sculptures start from everyday objects that they strip of their individuality and functionality, reducing them, in this way, to their basic essence and form. By placing them in a spatial context, an abstract interaction between the object and the environment arises, in which light and reflection play an important role. Their constructions constitute an artistic research within and into the rich tradition of abstract art. Their work exists at a moment of confluence of material and idealistic reality, and of static and mobile environment. From there, a synthesis arises in which both the architecture of the space and the movement of the viewer are involved. This also applies to the installation *Circa Tabac* from 2007, a triangular floor construction with mirrors, which repeats itself in the endless reflection of its spatial (museum) environment. Everything within the field of view of the installation is shredded, fragmented and reflected. In

*Sanguine/Bloedrood* the installation is set up in the middle of the round room of the M HKA, so that the surrounding portraits of Jordaens and Zurbaràn and the work of Pinsel and Ghekiere endlessly mirror themselves in an ever changing, fragmented constellation. (HW)

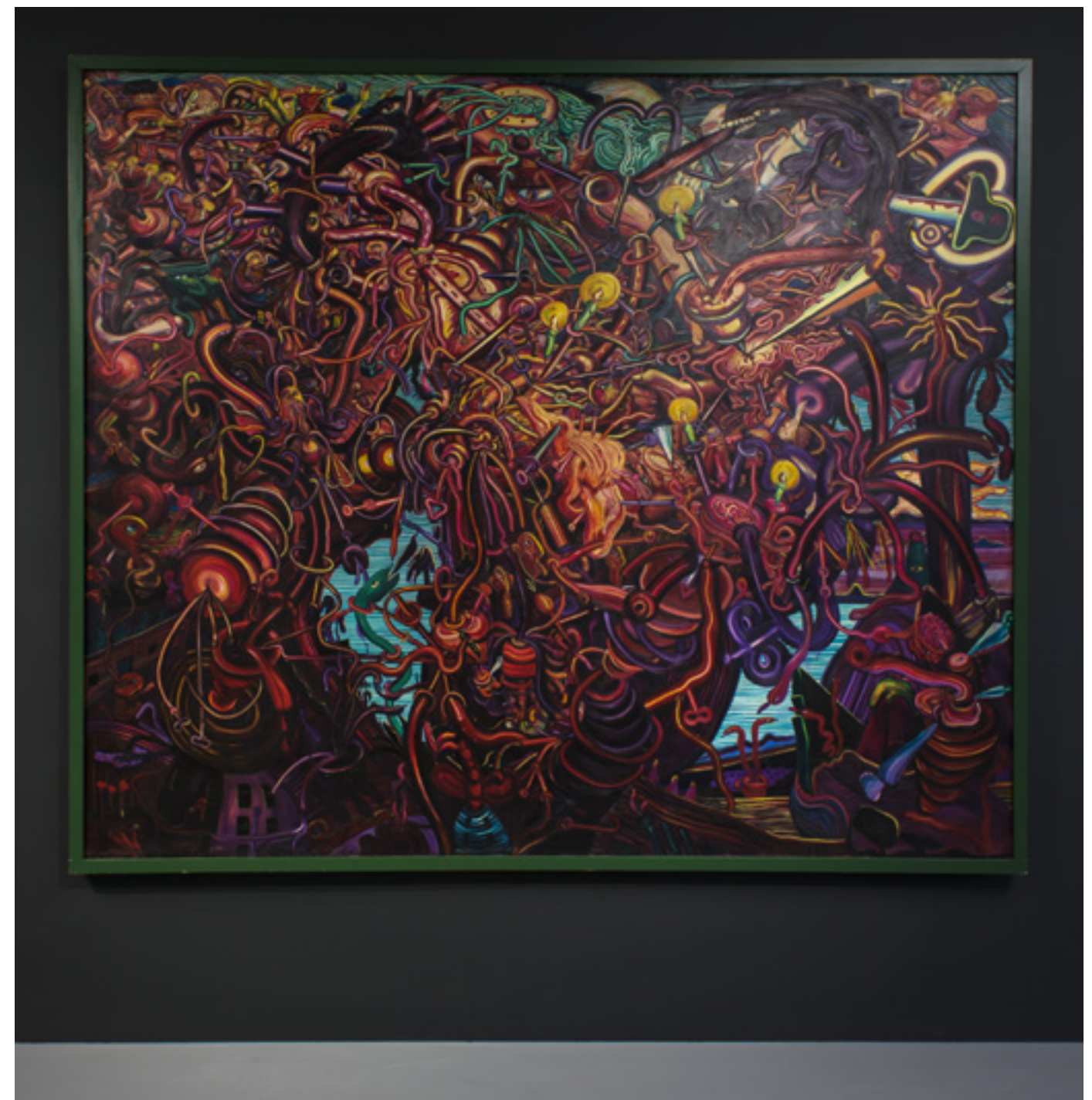






As a painter, graphic artist and teacher, Fred Bervoets (b. 1942) is a living legend in the Antwerp art scene. Artistically, he is a man of extremes: he paints expressive, highly populated scenes on wall-filling canvases, in a style that is poised between post-Cobra and Fauvism. At the same time he is the patron and promoter of the noble craft of printmaking. With great attention to detail in his line drawings, he engraves his etchings with nitric acid in zinc printing plates. Initially, his etchings are autonomous creations, yet gradually he starts utilizing the engraving technique as a base to be finished and overpainted afterwards. This results in a varied, almost playful oeuvre that is always based on his own life and environment, and that can best be described as an Ensorian mishmash of self-mockery and irony. Bervoets often places himself caricature-wise amidst the scenes he depicts; as such, his work reveals itself as a direct representation of his vision of the world. That world is crowded and ramshackle, full of anecdotal references and reminiscences. His visible enthusiasm and artistic vitality make him a valued teacher

at the Art Academy of Antwerp, where for decades he has transmitted his vision and craftsmanship to new generations who see in him a direct descendant of the classical Old Masters. In the exhibition *Sanguine/Bloedrood*, Bervoets is brought into resonance with the photographic portraiture of Gautherot. By displaying the spaghetti painting from the seventies on a black wall, the use of colour in the teeming forms is emphasized and the work acquires a compelling presence. In the endless entanglement of depth and perspective – reminiscent of psychotic delusions – a busy and especially complex world is evoked. Here, Bervoets shows the aesthetic violence of a machine in the form of a modern *pittura metaphysica*. (HW)



# Michaël Borremans

Michaël Borremans (b. 1963) starts his artistic career as a photographer and only gradually discovers his unmistakable drawing talent. The breakthrough follows when he expands his approach with the possibility of painting. Since then, he has mainly portrayed human figures that are visibly trapped in a thought, a dream or a trauma. The images are enchantingly beautiful, yet simultaneously alienating and frightening. The curator shows three early drawings – in which the artist plays with proportions and enlargements – combined with the almost epic portrait *Sleeper*, next to a portrait of Anthony van Dyck. While the dark tone of his work is offset by vividly brushed brush strokes – referring to Velasquez and Goya – the artist especially leaves room for emptiness and silence. (HW)





Mike Bouchet (b. 1970) is a native of California but lives and works alternately in New York and Frankfurt. Together with Edward Kienholz and Bruce Nauman, he is the third American artist in the *Sanguine/Bloedrood* exhibition concept. His installations, paintings and performances reveal the many problems of Western culture, ranging from rampant consumerism to deadly superficiality. He uses glamour images from popular culture, which he radically juxtaposes with waste, pollution and 'moral decay'. Many of his objects and installations give a functional impression, but their imperfection suggests a hidden sense of failure, falsification and deceit. His work as such is characterized by a cynical humour that is as grotesque as it is burlesque. With deadly seriousness he paints a giant-sized hamburger that screams so hard for attention that it does not even fit on the canvas. It is a hyper-realistic and exaggerated enlargement that refers to the idea of consumption, but that can no longer be consumed due to its size. The fact that Bouchet has his paintings made to order in China – he does not paint them himself!

– emphasizes the extreme vulgarity they contain. In the exhibition, the mundane hamburger creates a strong contrast with the nuclear portrait series of On Kawara, the black woman figure of Marlène Dumas and not least the battle scenes on the canvases of Rubens. Bouchet creates the same shock effect with his strikingly challenging *Jacuzzi*. It is a cubist-like and completely unusable bathtub, made of glued-together cardboard boxes, the inside of which was finished with fiberglass and paint. The artist produces them in series, as a design object available in different colours. On closer inspection, the work thematizes deception and decay, presented in an idyllic appearance. (HW)



The upright headgear of this workman suggests that he is a porter. His brown-grey, sleeveless jacket is tied up under his beer belly with a rope. He looks at us somewhat hazily and asks himself why the painter necessarily wants him to adopt a ballet pose. With this pocket-sized state portrait of a worker who pretends to be a nobleman, the painter may want to put a smile on the face of his audience. Perhaps the artist saw his model as a Flemish version of Pulcinella, the famous figure of the Commedia dell'Arte, the comic theatre that was uncommonly popular in Europe from the middle of the sixteenth century. The brush of the artist, however, creates a great monumentality that is rather unusual in these kinds of tableaux. This has to do with the simplicity of the composition, the omission of anecdotal elements and the subtle mixing of shades of grey with a little ochre, blue and red. The shadow cast by the legs on the floor creates drama. It is not clear who realized this beautiful painting. The painting used to be attributed to Adriaen Brouwer, although in terms of subject matter it differs from the drinking, smoking and card-playing

pub guests we usually associate with this master – or the pain-riddled grimaces during the disinfection of a wound or the operation of a foot. Perhaps the work is from the hand of Gonzales Coques, who painted genre-like scenes that thematised the five senses and also small society portraits. (NVH)





Caravaggio painted *Davide con testa di Golia* (*David with the head of Goliath*) three times, but this version from the Galleria Borghese is the most dramatic and the most iconic. The two other versions, from an earlier date and totally different from this one, are located in the Prado in Madrid and the Gemäldegalerie of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Caravaggio experts almost unanimously agree that the Goliath in this scene is a self-portrait of Caravaggio, and that it is one of the last images he has painted. In the Old Testament book of Samuel, David is the fearless young boy who kills the Philistine giant Goliath with one well-aimed shot from his slingshot. In Caravaggio's painting, David grabs the severed head of Goliath by the hair and holds it out in front of him like a trophy. His stretched-out arm and the sword with which the decapitation was effected, form a perfect quadrangle. Yet Caravaggio's David does not seem proud of his achievement. On the contrary, he looks down on Goliath with a mixture of sadness, regret and compassion. The head of Goliath clearly shows the wound the stone made in his forehead. Blood is dripping from the neck of the severed head that was just separated from the body. The light in his eyes will extinguish at any moment. His open mouth seems to emit a final death rattle. Virtually all modern Caravaggio biographers relate this image to the plight of the painter after the murder of Ranuccio Tomassoni. Caravaggio was a hunted man since that fateful evening of May 28, 1606. In Rome a death sentence had been pronounced against him – a sentence that, in those days, was often performed by beheading. He had been on the run for years: from Rome to Naples, then to Malta, Sicily and back to Naples.

He did not stay long anywhere, because he saw danger everywhere. And rightfully so. The death penalty was also a fatwa: any bounty hunter could deliver the head of a sentenced person to the pope. That is where the term 'headhunting' comes from. In Italy, at the time, there were gangs that made a living out of it. *Davide con testa di Golia* is a clear reference to that situation, albeit an ambiguous one. The painting can be read as the expression of a death wish: Caravaggio/Goliath is tired of being hunted and finally exhaustedly accepts the fate that has been awaiting him for years. With a last dramatic, masterful gesture, the painter welcomes the peace that death will bring. But it is much more likely that this painting was meant to save his skin. Already since his flight from Rome, Caravaggio's high-ranking friends pleaded with the Pope to grant him pardon. The crucial figure in those secret negotiations was Cardinal Scipione Borghese. He was the nephew of the incumbent Pope Paul V and the treasurer and political leader of the papal state. But Borghese was also a great art lover and collector. His phenomenal collection, which for the most part came about through extortion and brutal confiscation, was housed in the Villa Borghese, the current Galleria Borghese. It contains no less than six works by Caravaggio, including this key work. It is presumed that Caravaggio painted this *Davide con testa di Golia* in Naples, in the last year of his life, after he had heard that the Pope was about to grant his petition. It is not clear whether the canvas was an ultimate attempt to favour Scipione Borghese, or rather a payment for an already made decision. It is however certain that it was intended from the outset for Borghese. By portraying himself as Goliath, Caravaggio identifies himself

explicitly with the villain and the loser, not with the heroic victor David. It is both an admission of guilt and a supplication for forgiveness. David shows Goliath compassion. And there is also the inscription in the blade of the sword: H-AS OS, which in most studies on Caravaggio is read as 'humilitas occidit superbiam'. Humility kills pride. In painterly terms, *Davide con testa di Golia* is considered the most intimate painting that Caravaggio ever made. Quickly painted, with thin layers of paint, but oh so sharp and precise. In terms of construction and scenography, it is perhaps the simplest work in his entire oeuvre – we see only the upper body of David and the facial expressions of David and Goliath emerging from the dark, the darkest possible black that surrounds them – yet it creates such a strong impact. Theatricality that does not stand in the way of emotion, virtuosity that does not diminish emotionality, horror that does not distract from beauty. And also: David who is not portrayed as an apathetic killer but almost as a co-victim. A murderer who expresses remorse. Just like Caravaggio. There are Caravaggio experts who discern in David's features a young version of the painter. This would make this painting a double self-portrait. Peter Robb, the biographer who goes the furthest in relating Caravaggio's work to his life, sees it differently. According to him, *Davide con testa di Golia* contains a few obvious homoerotic references. The suggestive position of the sword that glides towards David's groin. The half-naked torso of David, a beautiful boy's torso with a transparent white shirt draped on one side. And above all: the true identity of David. Through comparisons with previous paintings in which this figure is depicted, Robb has become convinced that this David is none other than Francesco Boneri, nicknamed Cecco del Caravaggio. Cecco was the boy who modelled for the most daring paintings made during Caravaggio's heyday in Rome, including the only two full frontal nudes in his oeuvre: *Amor Victorious* (1601) and *John the Baptist* (1602). Cecco was already mentioned by Caravaggio's first biographers as 'Caravaggio's boy', 'who

slept with him.' If this interpretation is correct, then Caravaggio's gift to Scipione Borghese might, aside from being a humble bow, be a last, subtle provocation. Simply because he could not resist.

Caravaggio probably painted *Fanciullo morso da un ramarro* (*Boy bitten by a lizard*) shortly after arriving in Rome from Milan. It is a work that he made of his own accord; at the time, he was still looking for customers, clients and patrons. Together with *Self-portrait as Bacchus*, *Boy with a fruit basket* and *The lute player*, it is one of the early works – often combinations of portrait and still life – with which he quickly made his name and fame in Rome. All the elements that characterise his art were already present: an astonishingly accurate brush technique, an original theme choice (or very idiosyncratic interpretations of known themes), a powerful chiaroscuro, and an almost cinematic theatricality that nevertheless seems 'life-like'. The boy who is bitten is probably Mario Minitti. For almost ten years he was Caravaggio's favourite male model, and for five of those ten years they also lived together. Mario is the androgynous figure who infuses works such as *The musicians* (1595) and *The lute player* (1596) with homoerotic overtones, and also the fantastic actor who turns *Fanciullo morso da un ramarro* into an almost modern painting. The scream he utters upon being bitten is almost audible. Mario Minitti broke with Caravaggio after 1600 because he could not cope with the incessant binges and benders and longed for a quieter life. He married, returned to his native Sicily and became a successful commercial painter in Syracuse. There are two fairly identical versions of *Fanciullo morso da un ramarro*. One is in the National Gallery in London. The version exhibited in Antwerp is rougher and more schematically painted, with harder contrasts, accentuating the boy's startled reaction. It belongs to the Fondazione Longhi collection in Florence, the collection of the legendary Italian art critic Roberto Longhi (1890-1970).



*Flagellazione di Cristo* (*The Flagellation of Christ*) is one of the great works of Caravaggio's late oeuvre. After *The Seven Works of Mercy* for the Pio Monte della Misericordia Church, it was his second important commission in Naples, where he settled in the early autumn of 1606. Barely a year after his flight from Rome, he was already the great star of Naples. *Flagellazione* was a commission from the ambitious De Franchis family, who wanted to present a monumental altarpiece in its chapel in the San Domenico Maggiore church. Caravaggio did not disappoint. Christ has rarely been depicted in a more imposing and visceral manner. Clothed only in a loincloth, his musculature is that of an athlete, rather than that of a deity. Yet he bears his crown of thorns and his fate with dignity. Pushed, abused and gagged by the three rugged, tawny figures, the executioners of Pilate, in the mighty light that falls from above on his divine body and his pale skin, Christ suffers resignedly, almost turned inward. In 1972, the *Flagellazione* of the San Domenico Maggiore church was transferred to the Museo di Capodimonte, the magnificent museum on the Capodimonte hill from where one can look out over Naples and its bay. In 1998/1999 it was thoroughly restored. Caravaggio's athlete remains in perfect condition. (DI)







Berlinde De Bruyckere

Berlinde De Bruyckere (b. 1964) lives and works in Ghent, which is also where she had her education in monumental arts in the early 1980s. Her oeuvre consists of installations, sculptures and sketches that place the body, or parts thereof, in an uncertain position, between repulsion and attraction. She creates deformed human sculptures that she covers with blankets; she builds a pile of brushwood that she swathes in bandages as if it were bruised limbs. Or she presents busts and thighs that are hung away like misshapen hunks of meat. Vulnerability and impermanence are recurring themes. Since her sculptures simultaneously provoke fascination and discomfort, controversy is never far away. From the start, the artist experiments with different materials such as malleable lead, wax and straw, with which she creates an idiosyncratic beauty that always has an air of fatality about it. The blankets protect and suffocate, the lead roses seduce and poison, the flower carpets refer to growth and decay. This ambiguity is also present in her installation *In Flanders Fields* from 2000, a collection work of the M HKA, with which she refers to the horror of the First World War. (HW)





Thierry De Cordier (b. 1954) creates depth in his paintings through the use of dark tones. Yet also as a sculptor, draughtsman, printmaker, writer and maker of installations his tone remains bleak. To counteract the hopelessness of existence, he creates references in his work to literary contexts – through ironic titles and handwritten captions – telling of a nostalgic desire for peace, simplicity and beauty. In his texts he reflects on his distrust in today's society and the inability to escape progress. Philosophically speaking, the essence of his oeuvre is deeply rooted in the earth, although it is in spirit somehow detached from it, lost as it were, in a romantic, literary cloud. In the exhibition *Sanguine/Bloedrood*, Thierry De Cordier is represented by an extraordinarily tempestuous work, *Mer Grosse* from 2011. The painted image consists for eighty percent of raging water, bordered at the top by a grey band of mist behind which a vague light seems to glow. It is the sea as we would rather not think of it: threatening and unfathomable. De Cordier paints this frontal view of nature with extreme precision in various shades

of grey, accented with a few patches of swirling white foam. *Mer Grosse* is simultaneously overwhelming and ominous; it reveals the artist in his awful predicament, surrounded by a fatal sea. (HW)





Abraham de Graef (c. 1545/50–1624) or Grapheus, as he was also called, became a member of the Antwerp St. Lucas Guild in 1572. Initially he wanted to become an artist himself, but apparently that wish did not come true, because we do not know any paintings by his hand. However, payments show that he was active as a letter painter and gilder. From the middle of the 1580s, Grapheus is known to have worked as a concierge and accountant, as clerk, cashier and messenger. He also organized the auctions of goods after the death of guild members and directed theatre performances. Grapheus was very popular with his fellow guildsmen. Frans Pourbus de Oude portrayed him in his twenties (The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco). Maerten de Vos portrayed him in 1602 as a colour grinder on the left in the background on the altarpiece with Saint Luke the Virgin (Antwerp, KMSKA) and Jacques Jordaens used him several times as a model when painting *tronies* (mugs). When Grapheus' son injures guests with a knife in tavern De Drij Reepkens in the Korte Gasthuisstraat in 1616–17, his fellow guildsmen put money

together to compensate the victims. In 1620, de Vos portrayed him in the painting shown here as Dean of the guild, in full regalia, the upper body covered with 'breuken', a chain with silver plates. The exhibited guild silver will be confiscated by French revolutionaries in 1794. (NVH)





Sebastian was a captain of the Praetorian Guard who was to protect the Roman emperor Diocletian. When the Emperor discovered that Sebastian had converted to Christianity, he had him tied to a tree stump and shot at by archers. They left him for dead. Saint Irene of Rome found Sebastian barely alive, but nursed him back to health. Once recovered, Sebastian decided to accuse the Emperor personally for the persecution of the faith and the atrocities committed. Following this moral reprimand, he was beaten to death with cudgels by imperial order. This happened in the year 288. Since the sixth century, artists have portrayed the pierced and often writhing body of Sebastian. Believers attributed powers to Sebastian previously attributed to Apollo – the Greek god and archer was known to punish with pestilence, but also that he could make the plague disappear again. The worship of the saint increased rapidly in densely populated cities and regions that were repeatedly hit by epidemics. This was also the case in Andalusia, where he was worshipped together with Saint Roch by victims of bubonic plague and cholera. It

is suspected that Zurbarán painted this impressive canvas for the San Agustín Monastery in Seville, the most important home and care centre of the Augustinian Order in the region. The saint clearly stands out against the sombre sky and the desolate landscape and can be recognized in a ward or a prayer room from a great distance. Zurbarán gave the saint remarkably individual facial features. (NVH)



As a visual artist, Lili Dujourie (b. 1940) has since the late 1960s been creating sculptures, collages and installations with pure shapes and lines, made from the most diverse materials, ranging from steel, lead and marble to velvet, plaster and papier-mâché. She makes abstract, silent compositions with a poetic dimension that is evinced in the choice of materials, through which her work acquires a pictorial aspect that refers to painting. Her installation *The Kiss* from 1986 – with red drapery and a striking bowl, filled with a clear blue liquid – is a conceptual reconstruction of a classic still life. As in almost all of her work, the artist here creates a hybrid of painting and sculpture. The Flemish Primitives of the fifteenth century and the baroque painters of the seventeenth are important sources of inspiration, which is reflected in, among other things, the considerable amount of staging that goes into each of the works. The round shapes of the velvet and the wood are at odds with the strict geometric construction of the black triangle. The confrontation between the hard and soft materials, and the concealing

yet simultaneously revealing character of the red velvet give the work a romantic tension reminiscent of that between Eros and Thanatos. (HW)





# Marlene Dumas

The Dutch artist Marlene Dumas (b 1953) is born in South Africa where she takes painting at the School of Fine Art in Cape Town during the seventies. Confronted with the brutal apartheid regime, she emigrates in 1976 to Amsterdam where she lives and works to this day. Her paintings, watercolours and drawings with mostly frontal characters show various impressions of human cultural, colour and gender differences. The role of women is a central starting point in her work, which deals with universal themes such as aging, deterioration, sexuality and oppression. Dumas makes engaged portraits, infused with an oppressive unrest, and painted with a sometimes wild, hasty touch. It is no coincidence that precisely the work *Magdalena (a painting needs a wall to object to)* would be shown in the exhibition, a dark and penetrating painting of a female figure turning around. It evokes associations with both disgust and resistance. The gesture conveyed by Marlene Dumas in this work expresses both a remarkable directness, but also an extreme reticence, which functions as a shield of sorts. (HW)



Marlene Dumas, Magdalena (a painting needs a wall to object to), 1995    Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerpen, photo © Peter Cox

The painting style of the Chinese artist Zhang Enli (b. 1965) can be seen as the visual outcome of the two extreme settings in which his life took place: his adolescence in the remote countryside of northern China, and his existence in the hectic metropolis of Shanghai. Enli paints neither the quiet unspoiltness of yesteryear nor the hectic temporality of today. He paints life around him in its most essential objectivity: without any commentary, but with an exceptional attention to nuance and depth. After leaving the North, the artist is confronted with a new reality that he imperturbably disregards. In the anonymity of his painting studio, he begins to reproduce on canvas all the day-to-day images and objects that surround him. His are images that cannot directly be placed or located somewhere, but rather empty spaces, random objects lying around or discarded utensils such as buckets, plastic bags and dented cardboard boxes. What is remarkable in his oeuvre is the mastery of the craft with which he represents the naked reality of these objects, without any hint of criticism, irony or other connotation.

He strips reality to its barest simplicity. The buckets - *Container I* and *Container II* - play with the contradictions between content and emptiness, inside versus outside, while the elastic forms in the work *Inane* seem to expand and shrink within the space of the canvas. (HW)





The Antwerp visual artist and theatre maker Jan Fabre (b. 1958) is a many-sided artistic phenomenon. He is an energetic performer who explores the limits of theatrical admissibility, and he is a dedicated visual artist who creates a universe with insects, scarabs and bic-drawings that abounds with mystical references, metamorphoses and personifications. He is included in the *Sanguine/Bloedrood* exhibition with two blood drawings that refer directly to his challenging performances from the early eighties in which he uses his own body as an experimental laboratory to express the potent vitality of existence. Urges, desires, beauty and mortality are recurring themes, both on stage and in his visual work. The extent to which two blend together is already apparent in the 1978 performance *My body, my blood, my landscape*: on stage, the artist carves into his own body and makes his first blood drawings on the spot. In the following years, he creates wedding dresses with green-blue beetles, inks night blue bic-drawings and makes gilded sculptures of animals and skulls. Fabre fantasises, glorifies and brandishes, yet hidden behind the dazzling beauty

displayed, there is always a different world, a bloody and animalesque underworld. The figures that appear in his work are often angels, warriors, skeletons and animals. They are disguised messengers who emerge from the past to remind us of decay and destruction, of blood and suffering, of the animal in man and the human in the animal. In the smallness of the early blood drawings, Luc Tuymans sees both a humble and a grand gesture: a trace of blood as a remnant of Jan Fabre's personal writing. (HW)





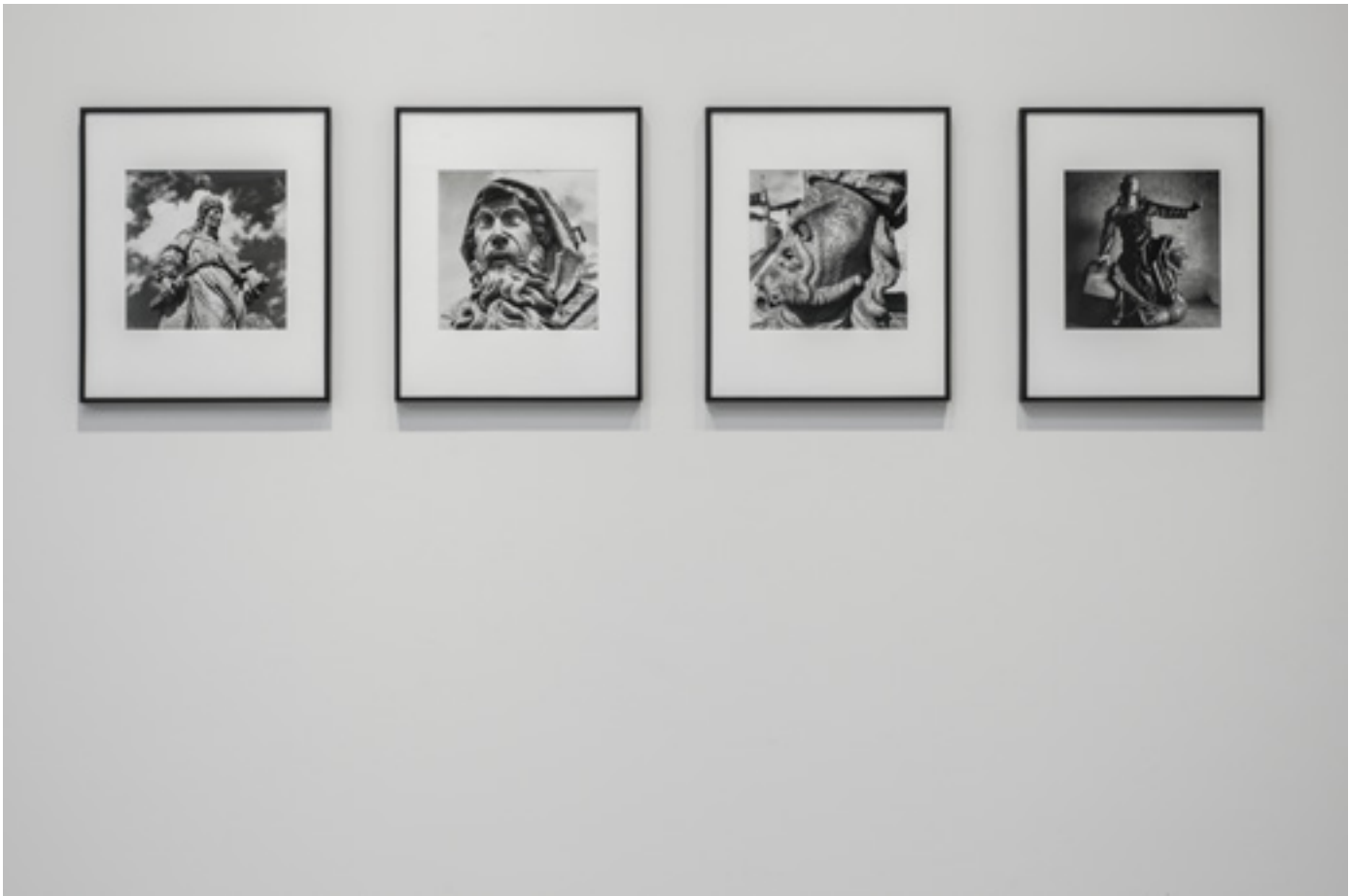
## Lucio Fontana

The Argentine-Italian visual artist Lucio Fontana (1899-1968) has broadened and deepened the avant-garde of the mid-twentieth century with new concepts such as environments and Spatialism. His oeuvre consists mainly of abstract work; monochrome paintings and massive sculptures that he cuts into to add a spatial dimension. He calls this type of work work *Concetto spaziale* or 'spatial concept'. Fontana brings image and space together by adding a visible intervention whereby the light becomes involved in the perception of the canvas or object. With Fontana there is no longer any question of different disciplines such as painting or sculpture, but rather of an integrated work that fuses elements of the installation (the artwork as a built-up object), the performance (the incision as action) and the environment (the artwork as environmental element). The *Concetto Spaziale, Natura* shown here is a sphere of terracotta – there are also versions in bronze – with an incision as a lively signal from the artist to bring the inert density of matter into action. (HW)



# Marcel Gautherot

The name and fame of the French photographer Marcel Gautherot (b. 1910) will always be connected with the construction of the new Brazilian capital Brasilia. As a young man, Gautherot interrupts his studies in Paris to travel the world as a photographer. During the 1950s, he portrays the spectacular construction of the rising metropolis – designed by architect Oscar Niemeyer. Eventually he will spend most of his life in Brazil, where he mainly focuses on photographing architecture and ethnography. During the first year of his stay in Brazil, Gautherot made a remarkable series of documentary detail photographs – always from a special angle and with emphatic contrasts – of the baroque sculptures produced by Antônio Francisco Lisboa “Aleijadinho”, a Brazilian mulatto sculptor from the 18th century. Luc Tuymans points to the colonial aspect of this sculptural art, which makes clear how much the Baroque expanded in space and time, as recorded by Gautherot. (HW)



Marcel Gautherot, *Prophet Daniel / Prophet Isaiah / Prophet Jonah / The Passion of Christ in Passo do Horto*, ca. 1947  
Courtesy Marcel Gautherot / Instituto Moreira Salles Collection, photo © MHKA

The German artist Isa Genzken (b. 1948) has been working since the 1970s on a versatile oeuvre that consists of sculptures, installations, videos, artists' books and collages. She uses hard materials such as concrete, gypsum and epoxy resin, as well as plastic, textiles and utensils from everyday life. Abandoned wheelchairs and walking frames are strewn throughout the space, decorated with a rag doll or a hat, and testify of a pathetic loneliness and limited self-reliance. In her work, the artist manages to subtly reflect contemporary reality in a socially critical way. In the late 1980s, she makes a remarkable series of abstract paintings under the title *Basic Research*. These are similar canvases that are completely dominated by the remarkable use of the paint, which allows Genzken to create topographies that present themselves as close-ups of urban areas or aerial photographs of extra-terrestrial landscapes. The canvases are not only ambiguous in the way they bring together extremes of perception (from micro to macro), but also in the way the paint traces transform the painting into a contemporary sculpture. In the *Sanguine/Bloedrood*

exhibition, the harrowing simplicity of *Basic Research* contrasts with her conceptual work, but also with the baroque opulence of Nadia Naveau and Pieter Paul Rubens. (HW)





The Belgian painter Joris Ghekiere (1955-2016) makes eye-catching work that is rife with ambiguity. He is inspired by beauty he finds in his own photographs or in images taken from the Internet. His lyrical and eclectic approach seeks to blend various styles and techniques, combining figurative images and abstract motifs. He paints still lifes of plants and trees, futuristic landscapes, masked characters, a glittering disco ball, tile motifs, a dead dog, and countless portraits of young women – often seen from behind – always with a remarkable hairdo, pose or facial expression. Ghekiere is fascinated by stereotypical beauty that seems literally too good to be true, and that, as such, provokes the emergence of melancholy and a sense of impermanence. The beauty of the image is called into question through the techniques the artist uses: colours blending together, so-called “Photoshopped” negative images, a strange shadow or an uncomfortable angle. As a result, his oeuvre, like that of several Belgian painters of his generation, belongs to the image-questioning contemporary painting: the medium is

used to question the image, both visually and in terms of content. For the *Sanguine/Bloedrood* exhibition, Luc Tuymans has chosen a painting of a figurative plant that appears to become larger and more abstract in a hazy environment. In the background, the scene is surrounded by a nebulous light tunnel that isolates and sacralises the central motif. (HW)



## Franciscus Gijsbrechts

A vanitas is a still life that depicts the impermanence of life. A classic example is this painting by Franciscus Gijsbrechts. A human skull is fittingly placed at the centre of the composition. It reminds us of our inevitable death. The upper jaw rests on a closed book. A run-out hourglass and an almost burnt-out candle refer to the passing of time. The floating soap bubbles on the left remind us of the fragility of life. The marble tabletop shows cracks, because in the light of eternity even the hardest stone is perishable. The pipe, the paper with tobacco, the music score and the instruments point to the pleasures of life as fleeting as smoke that die out as fast as musical tones. The book and pince-nez refer to the relativity of knowledge. The royal charter under the skull and the globe in the back of the still life make clear that power and wealth are temporary as well. The painter arranges the apparent disarray of props into a miraculous composition with a sophisticated planar division. A subdued palette with ochre, pink, white, grey and black emphasizes the seriousness of the subject. The Antwerp artist Franciscus Gijsbrechts is a specialist in the

genre. He was possibly an assistant of his father, the trompe-l'oeil painter Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, who worked for the Danish royal court. (NVH)



The French multimedia visual artist Pierre Huyghe (b.1962), originally from Paris, lives and works in New York. His oeuvre consists of a series of visual experiments in the form of abstract-organic sculptures or fictitious video montages. Together they form a mental time journey; he zooms in on the essence of mankind as a coherent whole, and adds to that the unique element of imagination and creates, in so doing, imaginary and futuristic ideas. In *Sanguine/Bloedrood*, he is present with *Human Mask* from 2014. It is a staged reportage in which a small masked monkey undergoes the loneliness of existence in a post-nuclear environment. Luc Tuymans presents this artistic short film not only because of its pictorial precision and social urgency, but also because of its remarkable theatricality. It is of a more animalistic nature but is made both human and anonymous through the use of the striking no-mask. The scenario, which is partly based on true facts, takes place in a devastated landscape in Fukushima, where the hybrid creature seems to be waiting in an abandoned restaurant for customers who will never come. The animal was

trained to serve in a restaurant and now moves impatiently back and forth into the ghostly space, listening to the sound of approaching footsteps or looking lonely through the window. The mix of facts and fiction leads to a surrealistic setting, a mix of routine behaviour, false hope and futile expectations. The film lasts 19 minutes and is projected onto the wall as a large horizontal image. (HW)





Jonathan Johnson

The German designer Jonathan Johnson (b. 1976) designs and manufactures gold jewellery with provocative symbols or expressions taken from popular culture. By combining contradictory elements – punk and luxury, art and politics, frills and philosophy – he turns the piece of jewellery as object into an autonomous work of art that is determined not only by its external form, but above all by his interdisciplinary approach. His presence in *Sanguine/Bloedrood* redefines this interplay of contradictions. He presents a series of handcrafted gold rings – decorated at the request of curator Luc Tuymans with images of baroque works from the exhibition – in a golden gumball machine that attracts the attention at the entrance as a contemporary object that combines sacrality with consumption. (HW)



Jonathan Johnson, *Bubblegum Machine*, 2018    Courtesy of the artist, photo © M HKA

Jacob Jordaens

In this fascinating study of colour and light, Jordaens presents the expressive face of Grapheus in two slightly different poses. The artist indulges in the juxtaposition of pink, ocher yellow and light yellow touches that remain recognizable as such - a free handling of paint that will later appeal to the imagination of the Impressionists. Grapheus posed many times for the painter, who depicts him head-on and in profile, looking up, looking down and viewed from below. In some cases these sessions end up in strange grimace-making bouts. Jordaens uses the red-faced appearance of his friend in numerous paintings, as a writing evangelist in *The Four Evangelists* (Paris, Louvre, c. 1625-30) and as a shepherd in *The Adoration by the Shepherds* (Paris, Louvre, c. 1650). In response to the constrained and predictable visual language of the Romanists and Rubens' heroics, Jordaens and the six-year-younger van Dyck revitalise the mythological, biblical and historical repertoire by populating it with characters of flesh and blood. Working with studies after living models is instrumental in this artistic revolution. (NVH)



## On Kawara

On Kawara (b.1932-2014) grows up in Kiriya and Tokyo, where he experiences as an adolescent how his people try to process the national trauma of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In 1955-56, as a 23-year-old, he makes a series of 30 death portraits – some after existing photographs – to capture the horror of this ‘atomic time’ on paper. The intended publication under the title *Death Masks* is not realized and the series of drawings – although intended as a moment of remembrance – is forgotten. After wandering through South America and Europe, On Kawara settles permanently in New York, where, a year later, he makes his first *Date Painting*: the painted representation of the date and place where he is at that moment, applied to canvas with calligraphic precision. Since then, every day, he records his earthly presence as an ‘existential statement’. In the exhibition *Sanguine/Bloedrood*, On Kawara is introduced with these *Date Paintings*, which denote a minimalist time unit yet at the same time contain a memorial element that ends in a concentric point. In the light of his early series of death portraits, the

paintings that were to serve as proof of his existence seem like a daily countdown to the end as well. With the *Death Masks*, On Kawara already looked death in the eye at a young age. Later – with the United States as his home base – the horrible images from his childhood seem to have prompted him to spread the message ‘I am still alive’ every day, as a sign of life force. Eventually it was not until the mid-nineties that the *Death Masks* were published under the title *Thanatophanies*. The images refer not only to the horror as such, but also to the genetic apocalypse that resulted: physical malformations and hereditary deviations. The series of lithographs is shown within the context of the Baroque because, according to the curator, they express the same urgency and the same reaction to violence, and reveal the universal and consistent manner in which this information repeatedly presents itself. (HW)







In America, Edward Kienholz (1927–1994) does not acquire the status he rightfully deserves during his lifetime: that of a cult artist who looks social excesses straight in the eye. In Europe, on the other hand, there has always been great interest in his installations. The strength of his work, which depicts a degraded urban reality in a hard and bold manner, is recognized worldwide after his death. Initially alone, but later together with his wife Nancy Reddin, Kienholz makes confrontational installations, assemblages and environments: life-size characters in a recognizable setting and in characteristically silent poses surrounded by banal objects. Edward Kienholz is an artistic contemporary and supporter of the Beat generation. The whole of his oeuvre constitutes a ferocious commentary on racism, sexual stereotypes, poverty, greed, corruption, imperialism, patriotism, religion, alienation and – above all – moral hypocrisy. Nevertheless – or just because of this – he has, in the United States, long been seen as ‘*the least known, most neglected and forgotten American artist*’. From the seventies onward, his artistic activities are increasingly taking place in Europe, especially Berlin, where he and his wife further deepen his oeuvre. In 1972, the duo is asked by Harald Szeeman to take part in documenta 5, where the installation *Five Car Stud* is shown: nine life-size figures, five cars, various trees and a truckload of sand. The installation shows a circle of

white men, lit by the headlights of the surrounding cars, who pin down, beat up and castrate a tied black man, while in one of the cars a child and a white woman – the companion of the victim – witness the scene with powerless desperation. *Five Car Stud* is a timeless shock to the system. An uppercut to the plexus solar of white supremacy and the unadulterated racism of the American *urban seventies*. After the documenta, the installation disappears into a Japanese collection, and is no longer shown for 40 years, until renewed interest arises a few years ago. Luc Tuymans wants to show *Five Car Stud* in Antwerp as it was shown in 1973 at the documenta: outside the circuit, in the darkness of a large dome that will be erected on the Waalsekaai, on the axis between M HKA and KMSKA. The importance of the installation, as a connecting factor between baroque paintings and contemporary art, not only lies in its theme that eventually led to the title *Sanguine/Bloedrood*, but also in the cinematic setting of the arrangement. (HW)



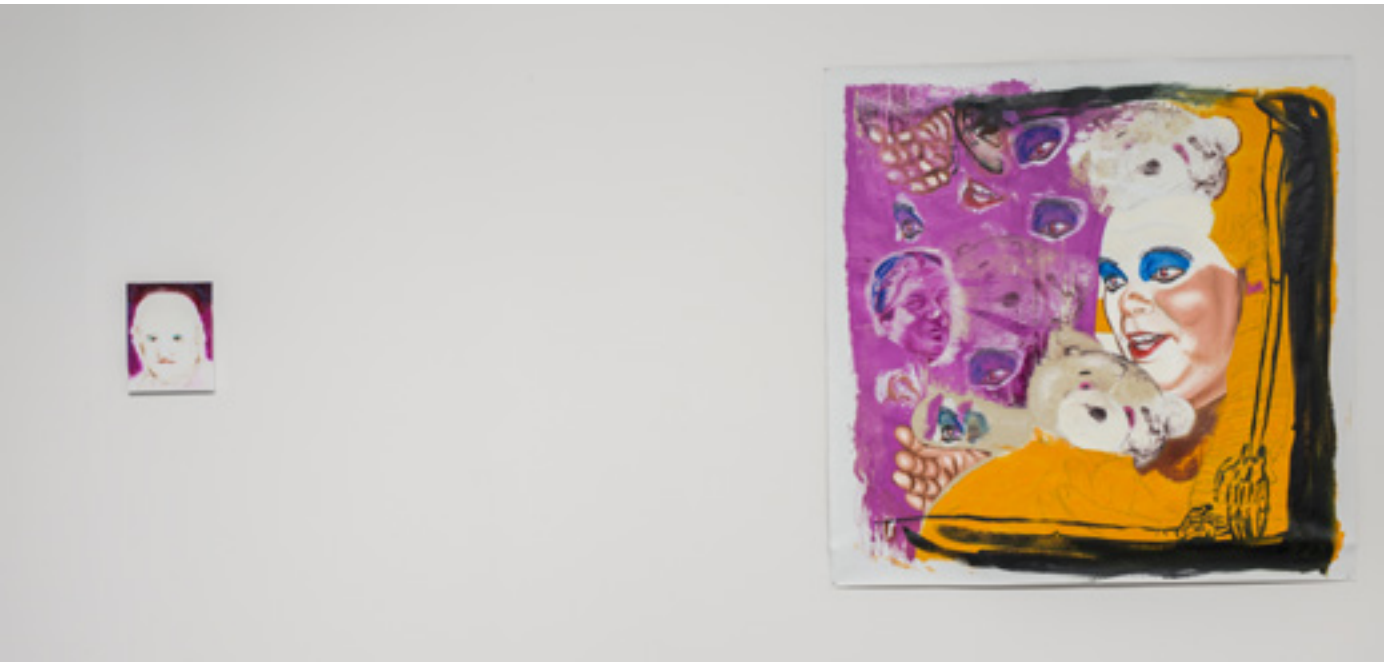






Jukka Korkeila

Jukka Korkeila (b. 1968) is considered one of the most important Finnish artists of his generation. He studies architecture and painting, first in Helsinki and later in Berlin. His paintings and sculptures are part of greater wholes that express themselves in extremes. He often makes wall-filling compositions with figurative images from popular culture, which he combines with abstract colour panes, slogans and quotes, and recurring patterns that refer to Andy Warhol. His portraits, in turn, stand out because of their graphic complexity and a daring but controlled use of colour. An important theme in his fragmented world is that of overrated masculinity: bellies and thighs swell, penises and ties slither across them, tears are mixed with semen. The artist hides his provocations under a cloak of playful innocence, volatility and excess, that draw the viewer into a contradictory world of doubt, humour and annoyance. (HW)



Dominik Lejman

The Polish visual artist Dominik Lejman (b. 1969) studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk and later at the Royal College of Art in London. He develops a technique to fuse video projections with abstract paintings on canvas, creating a hybrid art form that both interrupts and repeats the moving image. His work questions the principles according to which the human brain assembles images. Through the projection in the abstract structure of the canvas, a technological *trompe l'oeil* is created. In the montage *Harnessed Swimmer* from 2009, the spectator is confronted with a black rectangle in an unusual perspective, set within a light grey colour plane. An old man is swimming with all his might in the painted rectangle in the centre of the image. Despite all the effort, he remains in the same spot. There is a belt around his shoulders that keeps him tied to the edge of the pool. The image focuses exclusively on the movements of the swimmer, making the harness that restrains him a brutal, disturbing factor. In the exhibition, the portrait of the older man is hung between the portraits of Jordaens and Zurbarán, and is reflected

in the mirror structure of Arocha & Schraenen. (HW)



## Takashi Murakami

The Japanese neo-pop art artist Takashi Murakami (b. 1962) grew up in Tokyo and developed a special interest in *manga* (traditional Japanese comic drawings) and *anime* (hand-drawn animated films). Out of dissatisfaction with the art market and the general cultural flattening, he develops a style that he cynically defines as *Superflat*. His art consists of large two-dimensional surfaces with uniform colours, filled with Japanese cartoon characters and recognisable icons from popular culture. These wall-filling compositions are accompanied by striking sculptures; sometimes with the same busy colour patterns, sometimes entirely different from them and evenly finished in gold or silver. In this way, Murakami creates a busy biotope that is seemingly teeming with vibrancy, but behind which lie emptiness, superficiality and nihilism. To emphasise this, he uses the commercial market principles of Pop Art and has his designs reproduced from his studio as a mass product. Luc Tuymans points to the extreme PR idea behind this process; a practice that was initiated by Rubens during the Baroque by working with assistants and executors in

different workshops. Luc Tuymans shows Murakami's artistic and crafts-like process by means of a photomontage and various models – in Styrofoam – of the golden sculpture *The Birth of a Universe*. (HW)







Nadia Naveau (b. 1975) studied sculpture at the Royal Academy of Antwerp and shows her first sculptures in 2000 in De Zwarte Panter Gallery. Since then, she has built a consistent oeuvre of carefully constructed sculptures that bring together antiquity and modernity. Parts of busts and statues are organically combined with abstract, sometimes even cubist forms, transforming the basic principles of classical sculpture into an eclectic and anachronistic whole. Luc Tuymans chooses three sculptures with a certain baroque air, not only formally as sculpture, but also as suggestions of indeterminateness. They are contemporary interpretations with an upturned antique element. Whether modelled in clay or cast in plaster, the power of her work always lies in her imagination. She uses fragments of references that refer to an invisible past, while subtly creating a new time period in the material of the sculpture. Aside from clay and plaster, she also uses porcelain, tin, wood and even plasticine. The versatility of her practice always arises from the material itself, which also determines the power and language of the image.

Often, the same material is utilised in the pedestal, so it becomes part of the sculpture, or becomes an autonomous part of the installation. The way in which she adds new elements to the classical statue refers directly to the practice of 'visible restoration', which is often used in archaeological sites or historical buildings. Gaps and missing parts are visibly filled in with different materials to make the intervention visible and thus add a reference point as a time stamp. The artist applies this technique to the most diverse images and memories from her childhood. Moulded white sculptures go hand in hand with baroque sculpted portraits or animalistic wood carvings. Her fairy-tale world is populated by a strange mixture of soldiers, philosophers, astronauts and cartoon characters, but also animals, slaves and outcasts.





Since the beginning of the sixties, the American artist Bruce Nauman (b. 1941) has been experimenting with drawings, photography, performances and sound installations. From the seventies onwards, he will focus increasingly on video montages and neon sculptures that take language and language confusion as their central theme. Nauman lures the viewer into a hectic labyrinth of words, repetitions and contradictions that turn feelings of excitement into doubt and disillusionment. However innocent the starting point of the scenarios may be, the succession of nuances, voice elevations and changing emotions confuse the viewer. The artist plays with the uncertainty between 'misread' and 'misunderstood', and in this way uses his artwork as a means to instigate in the viewer a mental, introspective process. A simple mind-set suddenly becomes an annoying *mindfuck*. As a pioneer of the classical American video art, Bruce Nauman starts from an idea of art as an activity with a message that directly addresses the viewer. The communication he wants to conduct goes beyond mere dialogue; it is a treacherous call to take part in a train of thought, whereby the spectator becomes inconspicuously involved, and thereby part of the work. The visual language is so compact and direct that it becomes a mirror of

one's own soul. In 1985, this results in the video *Good Boy, Bad Boy*, played by two actors who mutually recite the same (scholastic) conjugation of 'to have', supplemented with existential concepts that, depending on the intonation of the actors, acquire a communicative, pleading or commanding tone. Because of the different speaking rates of the actors, the texts shift into an endless stream of words that becomes a compelling mantra, simultaneously enchanting and intimidating. "I have to... You have to... We have to..." The schematic rhythm evokes associations with teaching and education, but also with brainwashing and indoctrination. In the exhibition Luc Tuymans places the directness of *Good Boy, Bad Boy* diagonally against Tobias Rehberger's shadow play. The curator deliberately chooses this early work by Nauman because it clearly shows the extent to which the American saw the possibilities of video art before others even became aware of it. The video lasts barely a minute and repeats itself continuously. It is a compressed, iconic work from the collection of the M HKA, that imposes its presence in the space in an almost brutal manner. (HW)





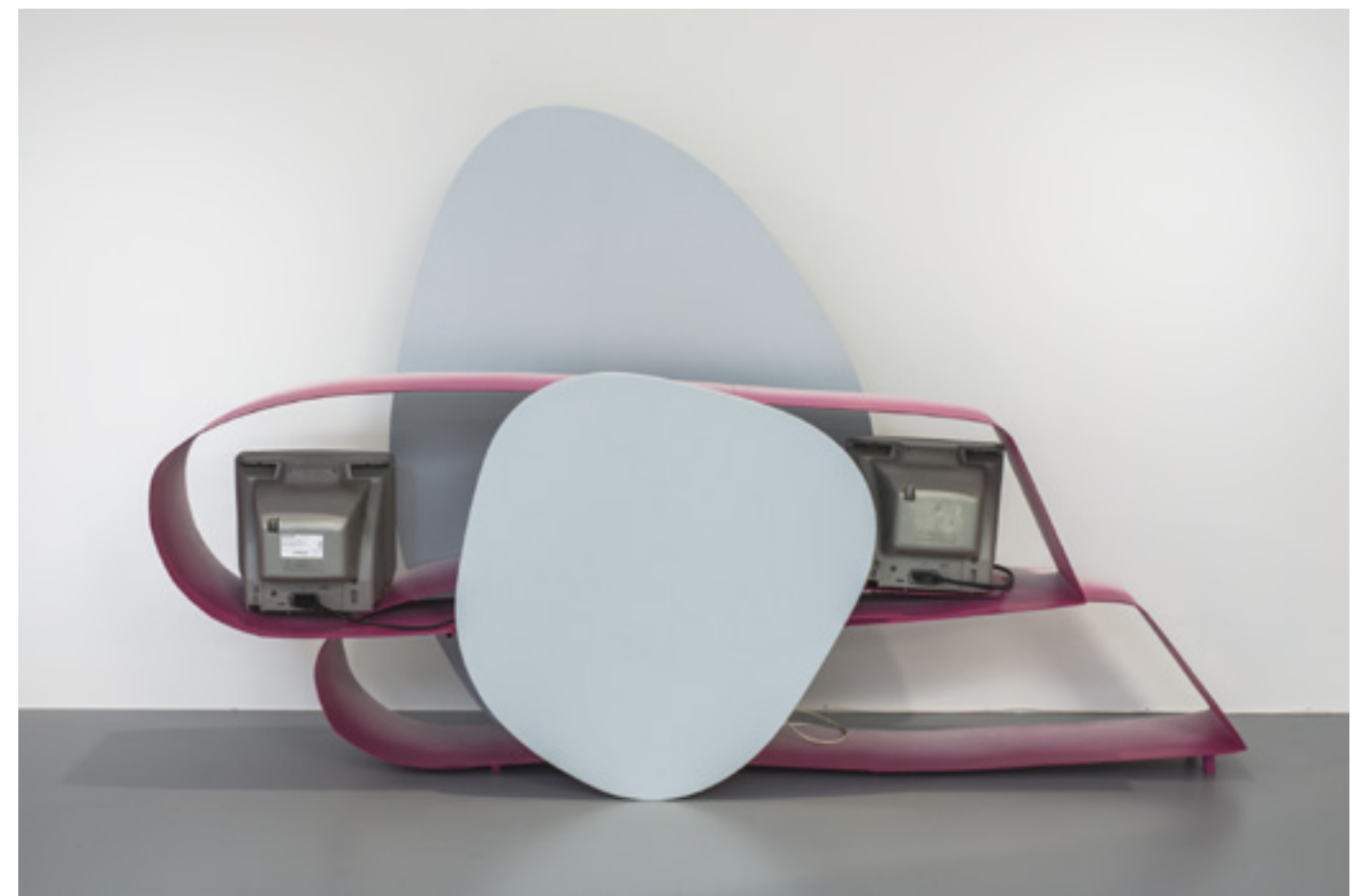
With the pentaptych *Lanterna Magica* from 1995, Luc Tuymans chooses an iconic work by the German painter-photographer Sigmar Polke (b. 1941), who developed a varied graphic oeuvre since the 1960s. Polke uses photos, clippings, slogans and politically inspired elements that he brings together in layered images. He experiments with the possibilities of dyes, lacquers and chemicals to create transparent images that seem to move within the image, depending on the incidence of light. With his *Lanterna Magica*, Polke refers directly to the magic lantern; the magic device with which one could project painted images on a wall using a lens and a candle flame. Although it is claimed that Leonardo da Vinci already experimented with an early forerunner of the magic lantern during the Italian Renaissance, the invention is attributed to the Dutch physicist Christiaan Huygens and dated about 1654. In the constellation of *Sanguine/Bloedrood*, Luc Tuymans places Polke's pentaptych central in the space opposite to the portraits of Anthony van Dyck and Adriaen Brouwer. The pentaptych consists of painted panels on

transparent carriers that pull the viewer into an elusive scene. Luc Tuymans considers his choice for the *Lanterna Magica* an evident one, since Sigmar Polke, as an artist, always creates political links between social imagery and alchemy, expressed through the transparency of the paint. The double images are intended to upturn the perception of the viewer. (HW)



The multidisciplinary German artist Tobias Rehberger (b. 1966) reinterprets spaces – both museum and public spaces – by means of geometric objects, recurring colour patterns and planes of shadow and light. His conceptual oeuvre is a combination of architecture, design and video art. Using recurring geometric motifs and optical illusions, he not only decorates buildings and interiors, but also objects, wall papers and design furniture. Through his constant exploration of the boundary between the public and the private space – primarily by emphasising it – the artist shows the impact of a personal intervention. Or the other way around: he shows how an artistic addition can become public property. In the same way, he also seeks to erase the boundaries of authorship and copyright. Rehberger regards all culture as public property, and uses it to undermine its own so-called specificity. Its use becomes pointless, but the shape of the object acquires an artistic autonomy that refers to existing objects. The play of shadow and light around the object is created by means of film images that are projected on the wall. The reflection of

the moving images brings together the formal and the artificial in a consistent formal language. (HW)



# Peter Paul Rubens

In the summer of 1639, Philip IV orders four large canvases for the *salón nuevo* at the Alcázar in Madrid. Among them are two canvases of about 350 by 450 cm, representing *The Rape of the Sabine Women* and *The Reconciliation of the Romans and Sabines*. Cardinal Infant Ferdinand, who is staying in Brussels, reports in the autumn of that year to his brother, the king, that the artist works on the paintings *con grande animo*. However, in around New Year, Rubens suffers severe gout attacks. A crippled hand makes it impossible for him to work. This, however, does not prevent Ferdinand from increasing the pressure on the artist. It is only in May that Rubens has recovered somewhat and continues to work until he dies on the 30th of that month. *The Reconciliation* is almost finished, but *The Rape* is hardly at the stage of underpainting. After Ferdinand van Dyck unsuccessfully requests to finish the paintings (he describes the artist as a *loco rematado*, a raging madman), Gaspar de Crayer is instructed to complete the Rape. Although he was not a friend of Rubens, he is considered capable. The two smaller works are finally completed by Jordaens.

The two large canvases will unfortunately not survive the fire of the Alcázar in 1734. The oil sketches shown here are Rubens' latest designs. According to the Fasti of the poet Ovid, the first Romans had not enough women to allow their society to grow. That is why they organized a feast, to which they invited a neighbouring people, the Sabines. During that feast they abducted the nubile Sabine women, upon which the Sabine men went to war. The women, however, came into action at the time of the attack. They stood between the two armies and begged the men to make peace. And they did. Rubens depicts the two essential episodes in this battle of the sexes, in which rough violence is conquered by love and persuasion. (NVH)

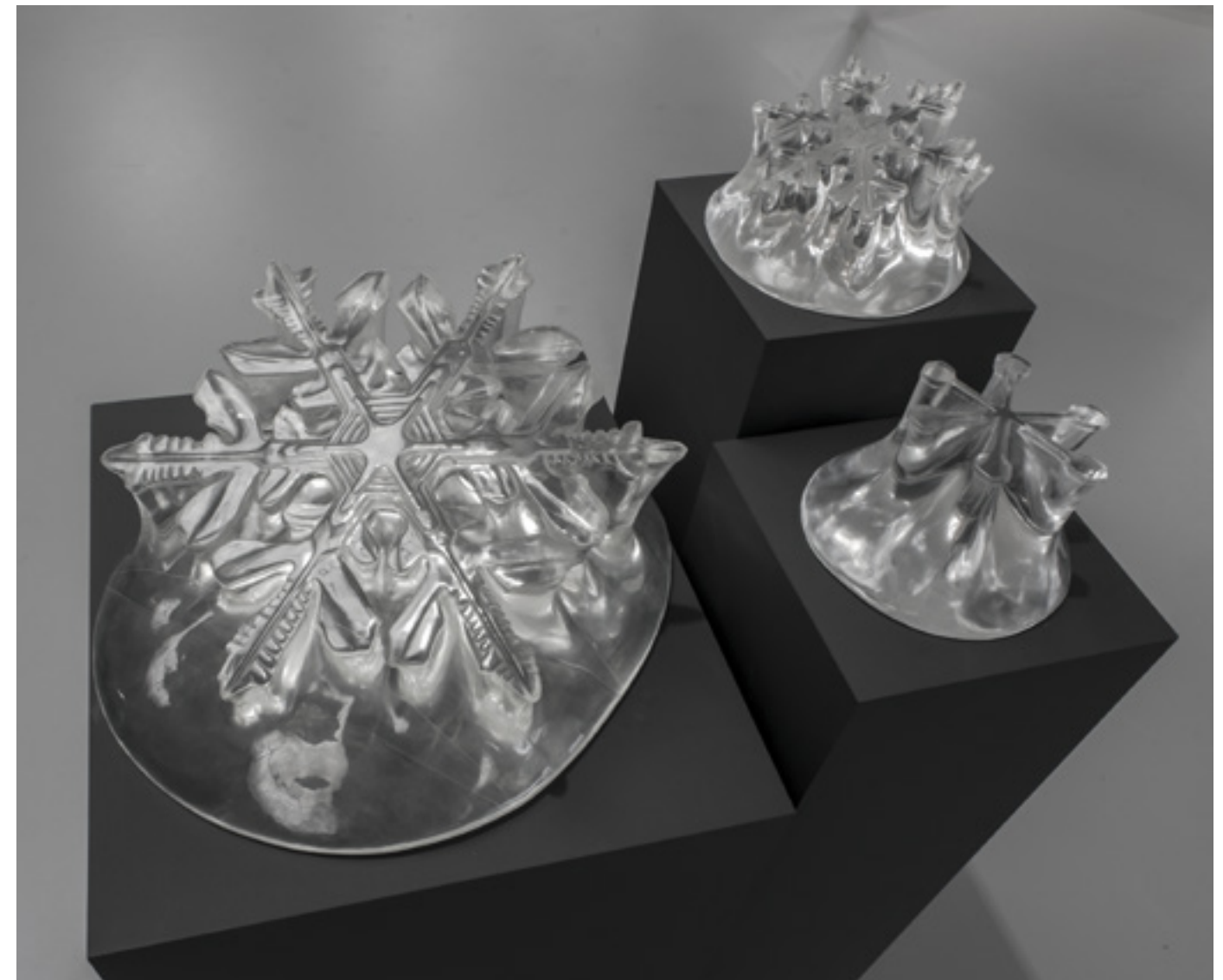


Peter Paul Rubens, *De Verzoening tussen Romeinen en Sabijnen*, 1640 / Peter Paul Rubens, *De Roof van de Sabijnse Maagden*, 1640  
Belfius Art Collection, photo © M HKA



The work of the Japanese artist Yutaka Sone (b. 1965) attempts to express a universal unity that brings together cultures and continents. The artist lives alternately in Los Angeles (USA), Chongwu (China) Michoacán (Mexico) and recently also in Antwerp, as if attempting, in this way, to unite the cultural divergence of different locations in unique but universally recognisable images. Sone studied architecture and visual arts at the University of Tokyo. Since then he brings together his fascination with both natural and architectural sites in organic, silent objects. The museum installations he composes are artisanal arrangements of the earthly reality, executed in organic materials, and often flanked by thematically related paintings. With his sculpture, Sone plays with enlargements of the almost invisible (such as ice crystals), and reductions of the imposing (such as landscapes, islands or snow-covered hills). Whatever he turns his gaze his onto, every visual impression is carefully sculpted out of blocks of marble or natural crystal. Sone is a traditional stonemason in the modern

sense of the word. With the precision of a 3D printer, he carves the topography of Manhattan out of an impressive piece of stone. The skyline of skyscrapers – intersected by symmetrical street patterns – is dizzying, just like the light rays in the tree sculptures on a makeshift mountain slope – also made of marble. By focusing on an enlarged snowflake cut from a solid piece of crystal, Sone seems to want to purify nature from all humanity. The wonderful symmetry of a frozen molecule is all that remains. The intriguing aspect of this work, according to the curator, is its smallness and the crystallised sense of detail, with which the work expands and transcends itself. It is perfect in all its simplicity, but simultaneously also presents an over-attention to detail. The tension in this work is visibly present: the solidified form of something fluid, expressed in never-melting crystal. (HW)

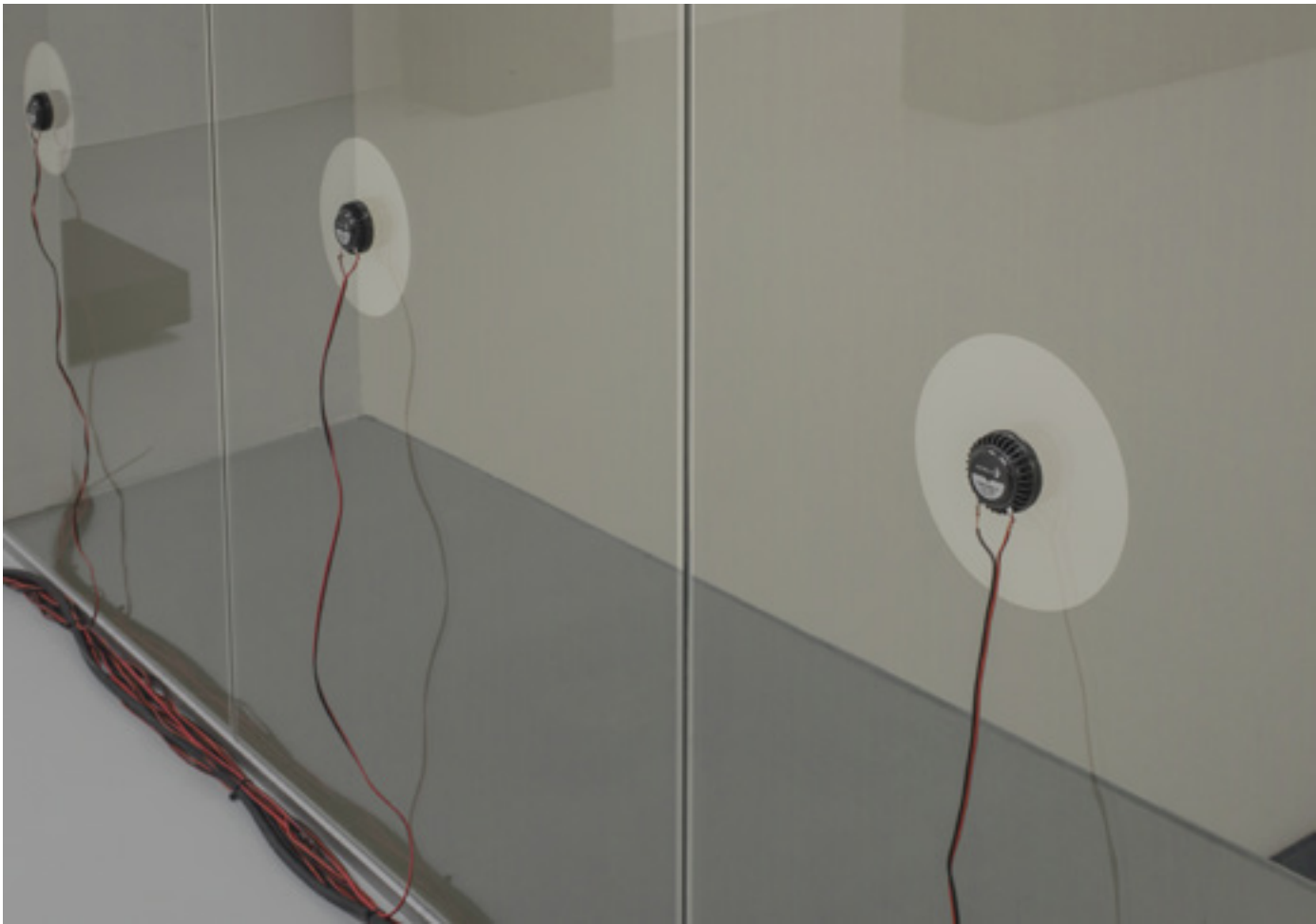


Henri Storck (b. 1907) is considered one of the earliest filmmakers in Belgium. He discovers the possibilities of the camera in the early 1930s, the era of the experimental short film. Storck mainly focuses on an innovative genre, that of the artistic documentary. After the Second World War, he makes his most well-known films, first about Paul Delvaux and Felix Labisse, then about Peter Paul Rubens. Storck tries to combine art criticism with the visual power of the cinema, which results in the first film about the life and work of Rubens with sound and movement. The filmmaker attaches great importance to the educational role of the cinema and is therefore particularly didactic in his approach. He defines the Baroque in comparison with painting to the Middle Ages, he refers to the composition and layout of the paintings, and he shows the life, the house, the women and the studio of the painter. The way in which he composes his film testifies of great cinematographic craftsmanship. He uses an early form of animation to analyse the structure of the paintings by means of lines and circles, and he plays with the

fragmentation of the screen to present comparisons between different studies or styles. At the same time, he brings tension into the image by means of smooth camera movements, lateral shots, and zooming in on details.



Piotr Tolmachov (b. 1974) originates from Belarus but has resided in Antwerp for years, where among other things he creates a dimension for theatre and film productions that can best be described as ‘sound choreographies’. He explores the sound spectrum by applying different processes and concepts – fragmentation, repetition, editing – to sound. Striking is his algorithmic and kinetic approach to creating hypnotic sound structures that fill the space. The montage of endlessly repeating sound lines is punctuated by interferences. His presence in the *Sanguine/Bloedrood* exhibition starts from this technicality – the construction of electronic sound fields with synthesizers and sequencers – and is here quite direct and almost interactive. By using the background noise already present in the museum space, Tolmachov creates a sound piece that moves rhythmically through the space. (HW)





Pascale Marthine Tayou (b. 1967) is born in Yaoundé, Cameroon, where he initially studies law. At the same time, he starts to develop his own artistic course, motivated by social commitment and global curiosity. Tayou travels with his conceptual oeuvre – a cross between Arte Povera, Recycling Art and Land Art - to Europe, and from 2007 he settles alternately in Ghent and Yaoundé. His nomadic wandering between Africa and Europe gives his work the allure of a visual logbook in which he gathers all kinds of information regarding the presence of cultural and national boundaries. His oeuvre is seen as a lively interpretation of the struggle for life, in which traditions and cultural backgrounds clash with the contemporary issues of the new era. His installations are based on artisanal sculptures, made from recycled material. Tayou confronts the viewer with seemingly innocent representations and installations, while the essence and especially the origin of the materials reveal a much less uplifting context: that of pollution, poverty and migration. With *City to City* our global responsibility with respect to this problem is immediately made clear.

Thousands of plastic disposable bags are strewn throughout the exhibition, like an elongated welcome banner for those who have made their way to freedom. Tayou sees plastic bags not only as the trademark of globalisation and a symbol of consumerism and pollution, but also of refugees who risk their lives in the hope of a better life, with their last possessions stowed in a plastic bag. (HW)



Javier Téllez (b. 1969) thematises the political-economic decline of his native country Venezuela in a video installation that takes the Lion of Caracas – the symbol of the capital – as its central theme. His documentary approach is characterised by great theatricality, which is used to portray in an unspoken manner the social consequences of the political corruption and persistent class struggle that plague the country. Actual war zones left aside, Caracas is one of the most dangerous cities in the world, yet Téllez does not show any direct violence in his film. On the contrary, he zooms in on the blind adoration that arises when the Lion is brought in as a national hero. It is an impetuous and at the same time absurd scene. The stuffed fake lion is carried along dizzying stairs through a slum, flanked by four armed agents in uniform. The Lion seems to function as a processional saint here, although it may just as well be the body of a *ranchito* that is carried away under police escort. When the bystanders, especially children, try to touch the immobile animal, the agents awkwardly recoil, as a sign of armed

impotence. Without sound or dialogue, the viewer is presented with the duality of political decay, which is portrayed in a quasi-epic manner. The fake lion and the fake agents suggest the setting of a heroic event, of something that could be timeless and monumental, but obviously no longer is. (HW)



David Gheron Tretiakoff

David Gheron Tretiakoff (b. 1970) is a French filmmaker and visual artist who often focuses on contemporary political and social developments in the Middle East. As a researcher he does not reveal any journalistic truths, but rather evokes feelings of aversion. He not only exposes the psychological consequences of national oppression and international terrorism, but also reveals the almost impossible habituation that accompanies it. To achieve this, Tretiakoff confronts the viewer with a poignant discomfort. The four-part *Immolation* shows four Arab revolutionaries who publicly sacrifice themselves through self-immolation and in so doing herald the beginning of the Arab Spring: Mohamad Bouazizi from Tunisia, Ahmad Hachem as-Sayyed from Egypt, Ahmad al-Matarneh from Jordan and Hamza Al-Khatib from Syria. The lugubrious drawings were created by means of cigarette burns, a direct reference to torture and burning stakes, even if what is depicted here can be considered as the most ultimate act of resistance in the form of self-destruction. The portraits were meticulously executed on fragile

sheets of paper in large format. They present a horribly detailed image. The burning male figures, surrounded by flames, seem to be consumed by an incessant torture; the burn holes through the paper show a trajectory of scars. Tuymans points to the cynical consequence of the procedure used: *“Drawing these images with the glowing end of a cigarette on the very fragile structure of the rice paper creates an almost poetic beauty.”* (HW)





The Antwerp artist Dennis Tyfus (b. 1979) produces a varied visual oeuvre that is not always exclusively intended for museums or to be collected or shown. As an artist, musician and publisher he produces and distributes drawings, paintings and graphic work, as well as video installations, sculptures and music. This range is expanded with self-designed posters, record covers, flyers, stickers and tattoos. His divergent practice is characterised by the artist's desire to maintain a great street credibility in combination with an anarchist attitude towards the formal contemporary art world. His painting and drawing work is a concentrated activity with a lot of attention for colour and composition. With pen and markers he creates colourful cartoonish drawings with absurd scenes or dialogues. (HW)





## Anthony van Dyck

A bony man is standing with his neck toward us. This is not in the least a classic portrait; it is a study, a *tronie* (mug). The brushwork is effective; it reveals a power of sharp observation and much refinement. Notice the subtle shades of greys, ochres and browns. Transparent layers of paint alternate with opaque parts and accents reflecting the light. It is not the identity of the model that is important to van Dyck, but rather the pose and the play of the light on his face and neck muscles. The unusual point of view from which we look at the man – in lost profile – gives him a mysterious and timeless character. *Tronies* are initially not painted for an audience or a buyer – they are primarily used as a means to achieve an intended end result – but art lovers and traders, however, soon think otherwise. van Dyck makes the study in around 1618-20, when he works as a young artist in the studio of Peter Paul Rubens. The *tronie* is the starting point for a kneeling figure who offers Christ a reed as a staff, at the bottom right of the *The Crowning with Thorns* (Madrid, Museo del Prado) and on a *Crowning with Thorns* (formerly Berlin,

Kaiser Wilhelm Museum) that did not survive the Second World War. The character in the large format, however, is half naked and wears a headband instead of a collar. The pose of the other characters in these two works is tried out by van Dyck in several other *tronies*. (NVH)



Jan Van Imschoot (b. 1963) belongs to the Belgian generation of artists who continue a purified pictorial tradition, and can therefore be seen in conjunction with artists such as Luc Tuymans himself, Thierry De Cordier or Michaël Borremans. However diverse their styles and themes may be, their oeuvre is characterised by a similar artisanal preoccupation with the continuance of the *métier* of the old classical masters in a contemporary manner. In Jan Van Imschoot's case this does not occur without controversy, especially thematically. Every work is an accumulation of mockery, corruption and teeth grinding. His oeuvre can best be described as 'contemporary baroque with a good dose of anarchy'. Van Imschoot brushes wild portraits and shots of busy interiors, with an alternately mocking, challenging or scabrous touch. The visual richness of his canvases refers both to current events and to world literature, while the ambiguity of his titles shows how well-read the artist is. The artist therefore also wants his work to be read in a literary sense, so that the painted image may offer a deeper insight into the

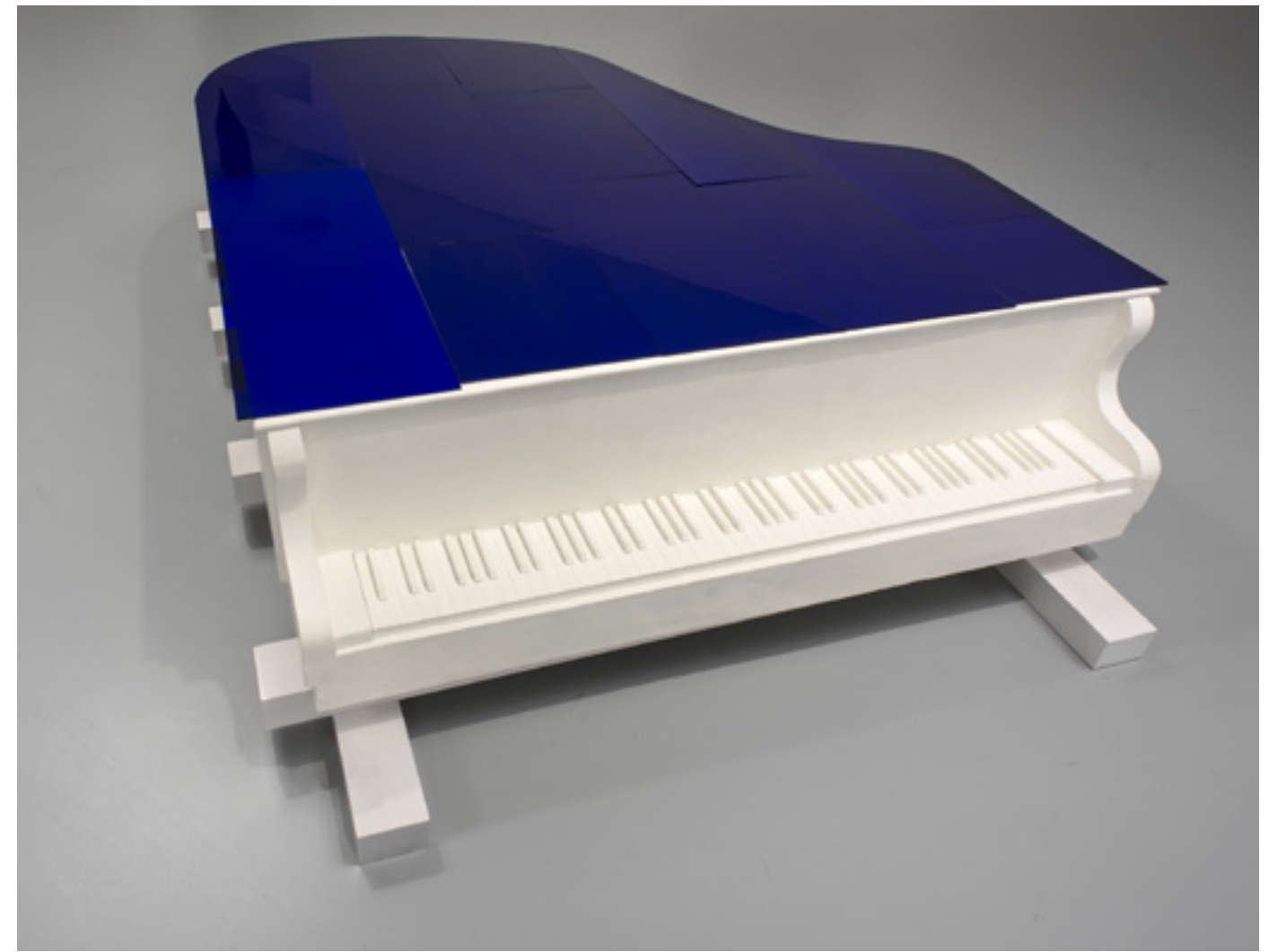
human existence, full of contradictory feelings and internal conflicts. The works are infused with fascinating reminiscences and cross references to known traditions: the intensity of Tintoretto, the mockery of Ensor, the colour palette of Van Gogh, the busts of Goya..., but expressed through the contrarian state of mind of the artist in the present. In the exhibition, Luc Tuymans presents a canvas from 2014 entitled *L'adoration de François pour Judith*, which, according to the curator, goes directly to the heart of the Baroque. (HW)





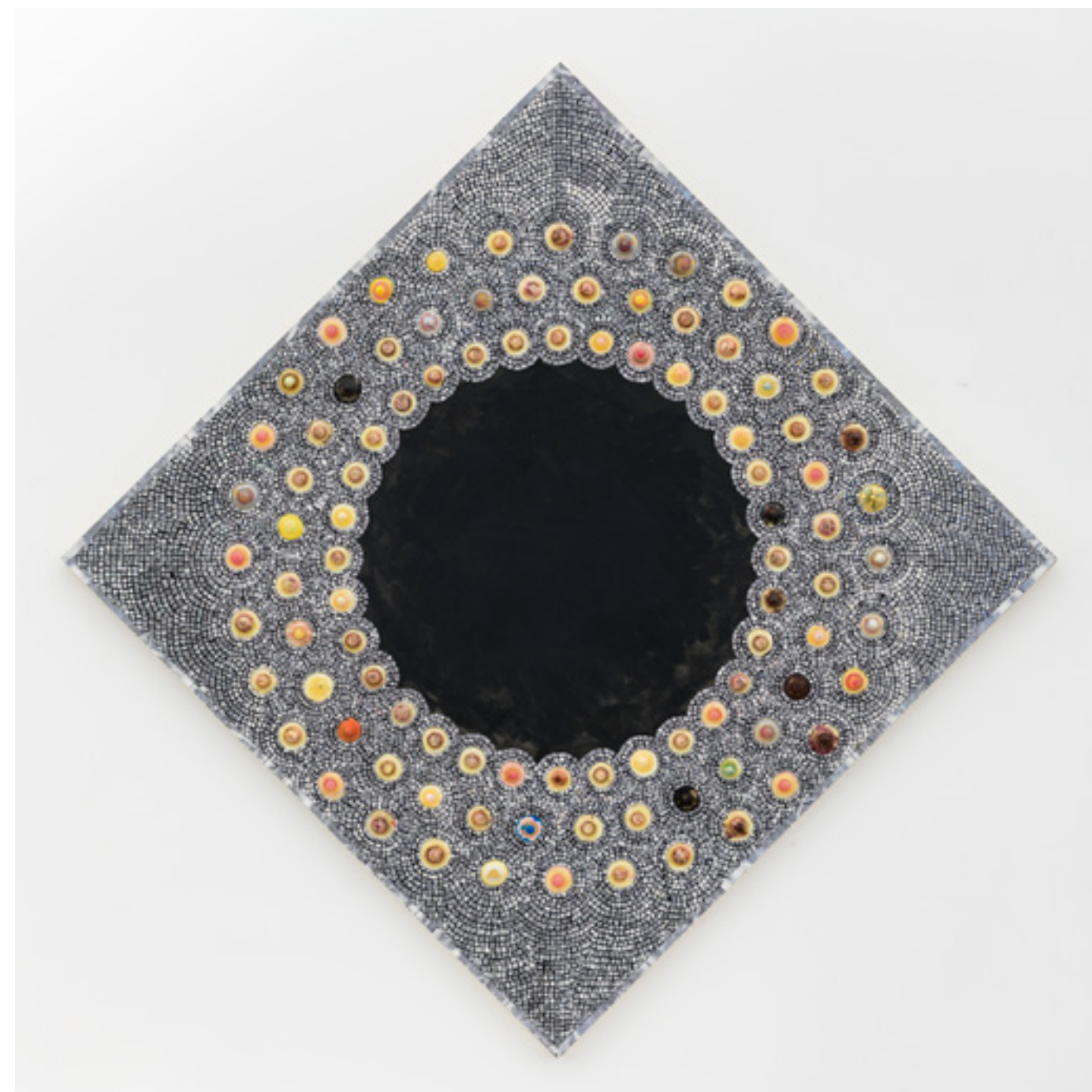
From the mid-1970s, Jan Vercruysse (1948-2018) takes to the museum space with abstract collages, installations and assemblages that primarily question the essence of art. Vercruysse is not primarily interested in the artistic production of content or communication, but in the formal quietude of the object itself. A practice that at one given moment brings the artist to present only empty frames. Vercruysse always focuses on the structural precision of his compositions, which are entirely directed inward. All forms of thinking fall away, the oeuvre is self-sufficient in the literal sense of the word. A series of chairs are hung with their backrests against the wall, straight and uniform. A white chair stands on a white sheet on a table, like an accurately composed *composition trouvée*. Order and regularity, geometric shapes and recurring structures. Objects that can only refer to themselves because they have become meaningless in the context in which they are presented. Or by the way in which the artist has composed them. We recognise a piano as a musical instrument, but the artist only shows the illusion that we

make of it ourselves. The piano is not only unplayable; it is not even a piano. It is only there in a formal sense, as a psychic *gestalt* that confounds the viewer. The reflective blue surface that lies on top of the piano, subverting its piano-ness, reflects the surroundings of the museum and every curious gaze. Luc Tuymans points to the whitewashed purity of this silent composition, which is disturbed by the brutality of the blue glass. (HW)



The American painter Jack Whitten (1939-2018) grows up in Alabama and settles in New York in the early 1960s, where he experiments with dynamic, expressive works that are content-wise closely related to the spirit of the *Civil Rights Movement* and the Vietnam War. Under the influence of photography, his work becomes increasingly more abstract, and is included in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum in the mid-1970s, at a time in history when it seems almost unlikely that the museum elite would ever collect an Afro-American artist. During the 1980s, Whitten discovers the possibilities of acrylic paint, which he applies on his canvases with spatulas and combs to obtain a tangible surface texture. Figuration and colour make way for complete abstraction. Lines, triangles and faded patterns dominate his canvases. Whitten radically embraces abstraction, unlike many of his Afro-American colleagues who often utilise narrative and didactic tactics. From that attention to texture, he gradually seeks to integrate notions of sculpture and collage, and realises elaborated sculpture-paintings,

constructed in paint, supplemented with tile patterns and mosaic, in a way reminiscent of murals and architecture. *Sanguine/Bloedrood* presents Jack Whitten as a powerful presence next to Rubens. The diamond-shaped canvas with a black core contains elements of the geometry that the old masters used as an underlying grid. According to Whitten, “*The essence of abstraction is distilled essence.*” (HW)



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# Luc Tuymans on Baroque

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An essay by **Éric Suchère**



Éric Suchère

The Baroque. The term simultaneously points to a simple and a complex concept. Complex when we think of its use in art history. Simple when we think of the way we use the term in everyday language without reference to art, just like we use the word surreal as an adjective in other situations. In colloquial terms, baroque can refer to something that is irregular, bizarre, unexpected, but also more general to something that is eccentric, abnormal. For example, a situation or perhaps a character can be baroque. In art, the term baroque refers to a style that can be applied to architecture, painting, music or literature in very different ways. In the visual arts the term stands for the expression of vitality and movement, through dynamic compositions and a varied palette, and this with great artistic freedom and ornamental excess.<sup>1</sup> Peter Paul Rubens, then, functions as the paradigm of the Baroque, halfway between Mannerism and the Rococo, culminating in the 17th century. After long theoretical discussions, however — based both on Jacob Burckhardt and Heinrich Wölfflin (*Renaissance und Barock* in 1888) or Benedetto Croce (*Storia dell'età barocca in Italia* in 1929) — the term is applied to artists as diverse as Caravaggio, Rembrandt or Diego Vélasquez whose work is contrasted with the classicist clarity. There would be a rather austere, naturalistic Baroque - Caravaggio -, a lyrical and decentred Baroque - Rubens -, an elliptical Baroque - Vélasquez -, a meditative Baroque - Georges de La Tour -, or a Baroque of light effects and pictorial *matière* such as with Rembrandt.

These divergent visions are important because they influence the way in which Luc Tuymans, curator of *Sanguine/ Bloedrood*, sees the Baroque and the way in which this aesthetic movement of a specific period can be related to the art of the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.

This all plays a role since the exhibition, apart from some works from the 17th and 18th centuries (Caravaggio, Adriaen Brouwer, Cornelis de Vos, Jacob Jordaens, Johann Georg Pinsel, Rubens, Anthony van Dyck and Francisco de Zurbarán), mainly presents works of living artists who can hardly be called Baroque in the strict sense of the word. Their aesthetics are also very diverse - what do John Armleder, Isa Genzken and Pierre Huyghe have in common? — or at first glance even anti-thetical to this concept — think of Lili Dujourie or Jan Vercruyse. I think this is why we have to start from one work: the *David* of Caravaggio<sup>2</sup>, which dates from 1609-1610 — so one of the last works of the artist.

David emerges from the dark, and undoubtedly enters the tent of Saul. With his stretched-out left arm he shows the bloody head of Goliath with open mouth and eyes. In his right hand he holds a sword that reaches just below his groin. He looks at the head or seems lost in thought. It is not clear whether his face expresses sternness or sympathy. The iconographic interpretation of this painting is well known: the head of Goliath would be a self-portrait of the

1 Alain Mérot (red.), Histoire de l'art, 1000-2000, Véronique Gerard Powell, 'Le XVIIe siècle', Paris, Hazan, 1995, p. 234.

2 During a telephone conversation the artist pointed out the importance of this painting in the concept of the exhibition.

painter, thus confirming that he is a rogue who was been executed by David, who embodies divine justice. With this painting Caravaggio would have asked for forgiveness for his mistakes - the murder he had committed. Once we have taken note of this explanation of the work, our attention goes to several striking elements in this painting: the theatricality of the black, as in most of the works of Caravaggio; the violence and the realism of the severed head, which is evident; the limited and sparse colour palette – which will certainly appeal to Tuymans when we think of his work –; the efficiency and a certain coolness in the pictorial execution – also a characteristic of the aesthetics of Tuymans –; the lack of pathos and expressive distance with an emphasis on the draping that contrasts with the violence of the image; and finally, the permanent defocalisation – one of the essential elements in Tuymans’ work. The gaze constantly hesitates between the central point of the canvas, the head of David at the point of the triangle of the composition, and that of Goliath, eccentric but more prominent; and between the brilliance of the folds of the triangle of David’s shirt and the bright shine of the sword. The painting consists of three blocks: the torso and the head of David, his shirt and trousers and the head of Goliath, separated from the compact block that is formed by the first two. Everything is simultaneously bound together and released in a painting that is a visual montage almost in the contemporary sense of the term.

Starting from this painting, we can distinguish several themes: the theatricality of violence, realism in the depiction, efficiency, coolness and economy in the execution, distancing of pathos and permanent defocalisation. These may not be the themes Tuymans based the composition of his exhibition on, but they offer opportunities to make connections between the art of the 17th century and that of our time, without there being any anachronism or exaggerated projection of old art onto that of today.<sup>3</sup>

Of course we can define still other themes based on the other old works that are shown in the exhibition. In this way, the almost morbid and disturbing verism of the portraits of Adriaen Brouwer, Cornelis de Vos, Jacob Jordaens or Anthony van Dyck could form another starting point. Or the subtle colour differences and the spatial density of Rubens, or the permanent torsions and fractures in the figure and landscape elements of Zurbarán’s *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*. All these elements enable the reading and consideration of contemporary works. We could also point to visual analogies between works that do not quote each other, but that are each other’s echoes. *Sleeper* by Michaël Borremans, for example, is reminiscent of Caravaggio, the *Thanatophanies* of On Kawara evoke *Studies for the portrait of Abraham Grapheus* by Jordaens and the two Pinsel sculptures find an almost natural continuation in Nadia Naveau’s *Deaf Ted, Danoota & Me*. We can also abandon those analogies between old and contemporary works and simply notice how the broken planes and diffractions in *Circa Tabac* by Carla Arocha & Stéphane Schraenen, as well as the permanent decentring of the visible axes, literally fit in with Baroque aesthetics. We could also talk about the negative connotation that this term had until the beginning of the 20th century. That it was used for a long time to denote a certain bad taste, which we find in the sticky irony of *Lanterna Magica* by Sigmar Polke or in the biting (and decadent) humour of *L’Adoration de François pour Judith* by Jan Van Imschoot.

Perhaps it is not the intention to find a connection between the Baroque of the 17th century and the possible references to it in the work of the 21st century, but rather to create a baroque feeling about the art of our time, or to point out that much contemporary art can be called baroque in the general sense of the word (irregular, bizarre, unexpected, eccentric). That is the case with the paintings of Joris Ghekiere, the sculptures of Yutaka Sone, the paintings of Jack Whitten or the drawings of David Gheron Tretiakof.

3 It is the choice of the artist and the idiosyncratic gaze of the professional that play a role in the way he makes connections.

It is also evident that both readings – the scientific and the popular – are simultaneously and alternately possible, and that they can be mixed and crossed or be present in different degrees. The question posed by the exhibition concerns both the shift and the friction. The works enter into a dialogue with each other and at the same time allow a permanent division with regard to the meaning of the exhibition, with regard to the meaning of the term baroque or the meaning of the works.

Finally, we can also talk about the title of the exhibition, to shed more light on the proposal and the selection of Luc Tuymans: *Sanguine*. Blood red. Of course this immediately reminds of the violent theatricality of Caravaggio’s paintings, but blood red is not blood, only an evocation of it. Therefore, there will be both violence and its simulation, both cruelty as the staging thereof, a bit of falsehood and, let us be clear, something that largely characterizes the Baroque: a somewhat contrived exaggeration of the facts, that is, both the urge to create a lively impression, as well as affectation or a technical process used to that purpose. Both violence and a distancing from it, both horror and the (sour) smile that follows, both shock and distance, both lyricism and its opposite – as can be seen in the work of Edward Kienholz, *Five Car Stud*, or that of Berlinde De Bruyckere, in which the grotesque is a nightmare, containing both realism and lies, in which illusion is at once created and cancelled, in which we fail to distinguish the real from the artificial, in which sharpness can become pathos, in which ecstasy can be discomfort, in which the work constantly oscillates between two irreconcilable poles.

Éric Suchère is writer, teacher of history and art theory at l’École supérieure d’art et design in Saint-Étienne

# Two Spectres

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An essay by Ken Pratt



Ken Pratt

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When asked to conceptualize an exhibition about the Baroque, Luc Tuymans' instinct was the juxtaposition of two masterpieces between which he could position Old Masters and contemporary art. The first work he thought of was Kienholz's *Five Car Stud* (1972), first shown at documenta 5 of that year. After 40 years in obscurity, it suddenly reappeared in MOCA, Los Angeles three years ago, was later shown in the Louisiana Museum in Denmark and most recently at the Prada Foundation in Milan, which acquired the work for the collection.

The work depicts, in an execution-like manner, the castration of an African American teenager by a group of vigilantes in the southern US in retaliation for alleged sexual relations with a white girl. Seeing this work, Tuymans instinctively compared it with Goya's *El Tres de Mayo* (1808).

The second painting that came to mind was Caravaggio's *David and Goliath* from the collection of the Villa de Medici, the last self-portrait of Caravaggio—his head is depicted severed. It was made for the Vatican as a means to fall back into grace with papal authority.

The keywords that Luc Tuymans ascribes to his reflection on the Baroque are 'overpowering' and 'overwhelming'. If his approach shows the artist's intuitive sensibility as a curator—something that Tuymans himself has discussed on various occasions—perhaps the original desire to include Caravaggio in the line-up of artists underscores the less obvious classicism at

the heart of Luc Tuymans' understanding and staging of art.

Both Caravaggio and Rubens' works hover over the show like spectres, the protagonists whose manifest deeds and works, as in a Greek drama, are reported or widely understood and not observed directly.

Tuymans, like Caravaggio is the product of the apprenticeship system, albeit a very different one from a modern era in which artists were increasingly taught through an academic education system. Yet, it's a "red thread" that connects Tuymans with Caravaggio, the product of the apprenticeship system, the standard route to artistic recognition embedded during the Renaissance. In itself it may seem an aside, a tangent. But it is, in fact, an ellipse entirely relevant to this exploration of Baroque in the inevitably Antwerp-informed vision overshadowed by Rubens and his busy studio of apprentices hoping eventually for recognition in their own right.

Thus, the position of the artist in society is manifest in Tuymans' discussion of the Baroque, almost a Brechtian alienation device. It's overtly articulated in the inclusion of Cornelis de Vos's portrait of the painter Abraham Gropheus. Gropheus is depicted in the full regalia of the Guild of St Luke. At the time, the guild, a kind of prototype trade union for artists, was a highly organized entity that ensured the status and economic buoyancy of Antwerp's artist community. Fortunately for them, their guild had something that

other trade guilds did not: the ability to create images of themselves and their place in society.

de Vos, himself prominent within the guild, here stages an appealing image of the artist as an august member of society in 17th-century Antwerp. In a clever sleight of hand characteristic of the best Baroque painting, de Vos inserts enough humanity and naturalism into Grapheus' wrinkled face to give the portrait an immediacy and empathetic appeal while simultaneously ensuring that the viewer is impressed by the painter as a social role, successful and surrounded by the trappings that wealth and status bring. Nothing testifies more to the staged nature of the image than the reality behind the painting: unlike de Vos, Grapheus was one of the least successful painters of the guild in painterly career terms and earned his living primarily as an administrator, servicing the needs of the guild and its other members. In social structures that speak of a modernity, one could be an employed artist without being a good painter through membership of the right organisation.

Luc Tuymans' vision of the Baroque, even if other inclusions raise eyebrows among conservative art historians, is nonetheless informed by the consensus—and personal assertion—that Caravaggio is the source from which so much else classified as Baroque flowed.

A commonly received reading of Caravaggio's work is that it freed Mannerist representations with what various art historians have described as an “(alarming) psychological realism”, preempting the Baroque.

In the work of various included Baroque-period painters and sculptors the viewer is clearly encouraged by the artists to envisage hyperbolic moments within himself or herself as individuals. The Baroque, it seems, explodes within our very being before ever being depicted on convent chapel walls or in some grand

painting adorning the home of a duke. This is the Baroque that initiates the historic discussion—about rage, sorrow that can encompass worlds or ecstasy in its fullest meaning—and whether it exists as abstraction or fundamentally deep within where we live: within our bodies.

There is a kind of a multiplicity to the discussions that Tuymans initiates. On one hand, the familiar form of the Baroque ecstatic body is found in the polychromatic sculptures of Johann Georg Pinsel, but there is also the artist's natural response to form and less commonplace readings of works. The excess of gold and sensual forms recur in Murakami's work, where the cultural divide make it a less obvious choice, but one that ultimately makes complete sense. The Baroque, after all, was when the first manifestations of what would become Orientalism started to appear in fashions for art and design in Europe, largely driven by the the trade through Antwerp and Dutch ports.

If one line of discussion plots the formal conventions of the Baroque, form being one of the things by which art historians have come to define art periods or movements, the other is acutely aware of the correlation between the Baroque and evolving colonialism. Naturally, these notions are not applied in an illustrative or simplistic manner. In the case of formal conventions, for example, Carla Arocha & Stéphane Schraenen's work *Circa Tabac* underscores the complexity of constructs that apply to image-making: it is instantly as Baroque or minimalist as the interior it inhabits while Pascale Marthine Tayou's work functions perfectly as a baroque expression, yet is riddled with implicit comment on today's post-colonial realities. These works function on a rational level, a scientific language of cognition, neural pathways and politics; all of them born and exported—or imported—during the Baroque.

Caravaggio is frequently cited as the artist who introduced psychological naturalism to painting, usually interpreted through

a psychoanalytic lens. And Luc Tuymans' seems to further highlight this psychoanalytic strand—rightly so given that psychoanalytic models are what gave birth to dominant art history practices in today's academia—through juxtapositions. On one hand there is Jan Van Imschoot's own postmodern revisiting of the Salomé and John the Baptist narrative in a painting decidedly dripping with an air of the 19th-century French Decadents as well as the tradition of the Orientalist odalisque. It channels an opium-fuelled demimonde of the 19th century, inhabiting a world of unbearable anxieties and confused desires.

Perverse sexual gratification may not be the thing most commonly associated with Kienholz's *Five Car Stud* (1969/72), but it's undoubtedly there. Here re-staged as close to its original documenta 5 installation as possible, the work is based on horrific true events. It shows a young African American man castrated by a group of racist vigilantes.

The tangible perverse sexual gratification present in the tableau does not invalidate the clear political outrage at the true events. In fact, one might even say that its true horror requires it. Occupying a territory that few chose to explore before Klaus Theweleit's seminal *Männerphantasien* (1977), *Five Car Stud*, entirely intuits the connection between the corporal and the extremist mindset. As Theweleit's text later argued, fascist ideology is born of sensorial and corporal experience. The men whose stories he explored—the disaffected Freikorps—became Nazis in their thinking through bodily experience. With them, as with the vigilantes depicted in *Five Car Stud*, extremist ideologies demand altering the bodily experience of others, usually as brutal violence that in its expression, as in its birth, has a psychosexual dimension.

The horror lies partly in that what is being depicted is castration. Somehow, had the vigilantes simply battered the victim to death, the justly outraged response would lack a kind of reticence or uncertainty that

Kienholz's work elicits. We are morally and politically appalled by what is taking place, but perhaps we are also slightly guilty that it offers such a powerful spectacle—something makes us unable *not* to look.

If the operatic and theatrical nature of Baroque art is well-documented, it is seldom discussed in the terms staged visually for us in *Sanguine/Bloedrood*. In Goya's dark works depicting suffering or atrocities, as in the Kienholz or Caravaggio's absent self-execution, there is a deeply psychosexual dynamic between image and viewer that makes us all willing voyeurs—and therefore somehow participants in the violence. Such works, modern or of the period, take us straight into the mindset of the Baroque, a period struggling towards a humane, tolerant Enlightenment on one hand, but when life could be snuffed out all too easily and gruesomely at the hands of the state or church on the other.

There is a certain ambivalent quality to how individual artists of the period make images, a definite duality running through depictions of extreme or institutionalised violence, a staged and aestheticised side that might tend towards a sexual delight in some cases or even an inappropriate, dark humour in others. Laughter and sex, then as now, are powerful defense mechanisms as Freud pointed out, the latter still being able to surprise us as late as 1973 when Nil Bejerot gave a names to what is now popularly called Stockholm Syndrome. No surprise then that artists might retreat from the horror of their dangerous times and find some meaning, reassurance, resolution or pleasure by reconfiguring the violence found all around them, whether through the religious masturbatory promise of waves of ecstasy, Zurbarán's almost autoerotic piety or Caravaggio's far darker interior narratives.

Caravaggio and Rubens are hardly the only reference point for an historical evolution in Tuymans' understanding of the Baroque when one looks at included

artists. Yet both demand a presence, even if ephemeral, visceral and outside of the main theatre of the exhibition. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that the intuitively seem to exemplify Luc Tuymans’ very first instinct for creating a show on the Baroque: two Old Masters between whom a kind of polar tension could be created. They may not be the painterly coupling first thought of. Yet, the presence they have in Tuymans’ reflection on the Baroque is entirely tangible: Caravaggio, the almost feral devotee of a new kind on liminal states or Rubens, Antwerp’s own and an artist who undoubtedly forged a place for artists at the top of society.

In *Sanguine/Bloedrood* what you are looking at in the exhibition space are not all historic Baroque works, just as what one sees in a Luc Tuymans painting is almost never a depiction of the artist himself. But that does not mean that, on some level, they aren’t a kind of self-portrait.

Ken Pratt is writer and editor

# On the Invisibility of Art

An essay by Bart De Baere



Bart De Baere

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In pre-internet times, artists were the obvious compasses with which to find new talent. Today, they are still valued in this capacity; artists are increasingly being invited as curators of important biennials. They can open up unexpected, razor-sharp perspectives on and with works of art that are not theirs. For the same reasons, they have, for several decades, also frequently been invited to shine their light on, and deal with, the most diverse heritage collections, both artistic and cultural, both ethnographic and local-historical. Artists are used as conceivers of the *Aha-erlebnis*. Have they once again retrained themselves as creators of Gesamtkunstwerke? Are they only stars, called upon at any opportunity by their groupies who are themselves unable to make their own decisions? Or is something else going on?

Visual art is a phenomenon in which objects become the subject of a form of speculation against which the seventeenth-century Dutch tulip mania pales in comparison. These are objects that remain credible despite being centuries and miles removed from their place of origin, even if they are 're-displayed' under very different circumstances than originally intended and for goals that have little to do with their initial purpose. Visual art is also a capacity, the one that the artist once used to make a visual move in the complex circumstances of a specific moment, which then became part of that phenomenon of objects.

It is this capacity that ensures that artworks can exist outside their time. After all, visual intelligence does not

follow a discursive trajectory that can then be traversed again, afterwards, as in the analytical, objectifying rationalism that builds on systematized verbal processes. The complement thereof in Western tradition, visual thinking, is rather like an inverted cluster bomb; with each stroke, an endless network of connections is brought forth. These connections concern both the worldviews of the moment and speculations about what went before and what could follow, as well as the most fussy remarks arising from the direct experience of the moment. They concern grandiloquence and small-scaleness, the public sphere and intimacy, desire and loss, coherence and diversity. Here they reject, there they indicate, elsewhere they refer. It is this multitude of decisive links that allow a work of art to be credible outside of its place of origin and after its moment of creation. While some connections become lost, the specificity of the links do encourage the creation of new connections between the work and the outside world in which it has ended up. It is as if Alexander the Great would not only cut the Gordian knot but then immediately restore it to its original state.

This mix of large and small connections is of all eras to which we ascribe the concept of art. While it is obviously nonsense to draw a boundary timeline between classic, modern and contemporary art, there are still two distinct time spaces: the one in which art is embedded in a social consensus, and the other in which art relates to society on the basis of dissensus. In both, art shows a range of connections with both large stories

and with momentary experiences – yet the emphases differ and are expressed differently.

During the Ancien Régime - and during the bourgeois period that, as its heir, aims to continue this regime - the meaning of art is embedded in the broad social consensus. Known to us, first and foremost, are the great social stories of the fine art of this period, the grid onto which the image rests. In addition, we also know that there were concrete, incidental connections, although we only have occasional indications to this effect.

Artists can also be obstructionists in this regime, as Caravaggio so obviously was, and they can be critical. In 1998, the Ghent city archivist Johan Decavele discovered the background story of Flanders' most famous work of art, *The Adoration of the Lamb of God*: the murder of a Burgundian official by the brother of Judocus Vijd, who ordered the murder. As a candidate mayor of the city of Ghent, he had to make a compensatory move: Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Van Eyck, courtier at the Burgundian court, must certainly have known this. It strengthens Jan Hoet's suspicion that van Eyck consciously portrayed the donor's purse closest to the viewer. Dissensus therefore does exist in this regime, but remains embedded in a consensual story.

In the twentieth century - with a prequel that started somewhere in the nineteenth - the matter is exactly opposite. Artists can pursue a broad social consensus for their vision and can, after some time, even become part of it in a strictly edited form - think of Magritte, Mondriaan or Picasso - but their basic status vis-à-vis the social structure is that of dissensus. To an ever-broader extent the notion of an avant-garde is used, a vanguard, a group that operates separately from the social corpus and that explores both the future and the outdoor space. The historical avant-garde before the Second World War has a ground-breaking ambition that equals that of the great ideologies of that

time. The post-war avant-garde from the second half of the twentieth century rather attempts to further cultivate its inheritance as its own space of opportunity. Art and society largely exist side by side.

The consequences of this separation between the broad, societal space and the space of art are far-reaching. They show themselves in the design of the artworks, but also in the expression of the broader artistic imagination of the artist, the imagination from which the artworks not only originate, but which also creates their embedding, in the absence of a predetermined base of social support. As such, the exterior side of art in which its artistic capacity resonates, becomes its full complement. The stories overwhelm the image, the frame becomes autonomous and the edges are consciously thematised in themselves.

While in the past many connections were implied in an artistic practice that was initially based on powerful consensual grids, they are now forced to be made explicit. Every step of art – even those outside the actual work of art – is composed in itself. The capacity of art leaves traces in many areas and occupies various positions. Sometimes it no longer primarily concerns a 'broadened' appearance, and the 'invisible', energetic dimension of art-as-capacity-in-itself even prevails on its dimension as images, objects and other visible positions. This can occur as a form of negative theology, as in the first 'anti-art movement', Dadaism, but just as well - conversely - in an attempt to effectively and programmatically thrust art outside of itself and into the world, as in the Vkhutemas or Bauhaus art schools that aim to shape the entire human environment. Radical and strong images emerge in both poles. Yet neither the artists themselves nor the public opinion see them as the central concepts of the artistic enterprise. It is in the first place about an attitude that is partly supported by an amalgam of anecdotes and a description of circumstances. The stories overwhelm the image.

The fact that public support is no longer a given fact, makes that artists increasingly create the framework for their art in an autonomous way. Marcel Duchamp is not just the collected stories of a fountain, his silent chess-playing or his alter ego *Rrose Selavy*, it is also the reality of an artist who exerted a powerful influence on the origins of the MoMA in New York, an artist who created with his *Boîte-en-valise* the ultimate prototype of an artist's contextualization of his own work. In the Ancien Régime, artists paid attention to the framing of their work as well - Rubens ensured that he acquired patents, the equivalent of the copyright at that time, for engravings after his own work – but the avant-garde sees itself obliged, precisely because of its self-declared precarious status, to take control of the entire apparatus for making art visible. Not only does it organize exhibitions, it also finds radically innovative presentation methods, creates magazines and designs them, appropriates all the media it can lay its hands on, posters, invitations, artist publications,... In the post-war avant-garde, these artistically autonomous forms of framing each become a genre with their own history. Not only do the titles of works of art become part of the oeuvre, but the titles of exhibitions often become part of it as well; after all, they are informed by and conversely feed the artistic energy.

These broadenings of art outside of itself are not limited to the vital necessity of art to exist in the world or to a framing apparatus that is necessarily taken into one's own hands. The edges of what art is are also consciously being thematised as an exciting possibility to broaden the formal spectrum of art. Everything can be material – the artist's own body, behaviour, information, food, nature, architecture, ... – which makes that everything an artist engages with will also become an artistic expression to some extent. After all, the art scene looks at it as an opportunity to gain insight, which makes that the negation of that possibility also acquires meaning. *Untitled* is one of the most used titles in the twentieth century, and

'without attitude' one of the most cultivated artist's poses. In a certain sense, the most far-reaching in this *Erweiterter Kunstbegriff* are the artists of the relational aesthetics such as Rikrit Tiravanjit or Nico Dockx, who have indeed abandoned the ground-breaking ethos of the historical avant-garde and the rhetoric of Joseph Beuys, yet who engage in a lifelong commitment to creating social interactions in all kinds of ways. The effectiveness of this approach may be limited, but is nonetheless real. The transition between art and society has become so quasi-seamless, that there are no longer two distinct visions.

If art is no longer exclusively determined by works of art, and even no longer necessarily by works of art, then it makes sense to focus on visual art as a capacity, as an invisible force that can leave traces in all kinds of manifestations and moments. It is precisely through coherent choices that a horizon is determined, and that the possibility of making a world is evoked. This visual intelligence is directed by a sharp perspective that immediately determines what is good and what is bad, creating, in this way, a position. This directed intelligence can be used by an artist both to make a visual move in a certain moment that will become an unforgettable image, or to shape a complex context into a viable possibility of art, and even to obscure art as a form, to evoke its capacity.

Art is always simultaneously visible and invisible, phenomenon and capacity.

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Installation View: Jukka Korkeila, Jan Vercruysse, Cornelis De Vos, photo © M HKA, © SABAM Belgium 2018

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